

PEACE, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Zosimo Lee
Ma. Cecilia Gastardo-Conaco

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FOREWORD

Peace Zones or geographic-based communities of citizens committed to peace, social justice and self-determination, emerged in the 1980s as creative social experiments in some wartorn areas of the Philippines. Initiated at the grassroots by victims of armed conflict, these zones reflect on one hand a public outrage against the burden of violent confrontations and on the other, the willingness of residents to go through the extremely difficult process of peace building in order to silence the weapons of war.

Zosimo Lee and Cecilia Conaco's research report provides an overview of four peace zones -- chronicling their development, alluding to some of the factors which facilitated or constrained particular outcomes, and suggesting their probable trajectories given crucial differences in the mindsets of the human agents involved.

The research on which the report is based is a preliminary study of an ongoing process. As such, it only provides a snapshot of how the process was reconstructed by key informants and how it unfolded from June to December 1992 when the fieldwork was done. The next phase of this study is a research aimed specifically to capture parts of the process methodologically and analyze it more deeply for the lessons it can bequeath to similarly situated communities.

This second report under the *Peace, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights Series* of the UP-Center for Integrative and Development Studies was written by Dr. Zosimo Lee (Dean of UP Tacloban and Associate Professor of the Department of Philosophy, UP Diliman) and Dr. Cecilia Conaco (Associate Professor of the Department of Psychology, UP Diliman). They were assisted in the field by Gemma Perante and Alfredo Que. Prof. Edmundo Garcia reviewed the report while Karen Singson provided editorial assistance. Bella Lucas, Stretch Payawal, Michael Arciga and Joy Aparis saw the report through its publication.

As in all UP-CIDS publications, the analysis and recommendations are those of the authors whose academic freedom is upheld by the University.

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PEACE ZONES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Introduction

When two people or two groups of people interact, there is always a potential for conflict because of the inevitable differences between their separate needs and goals. When resources are limited and everybody is determined to obtain their fair share, when methodologies for resolving matters of contention are as varied as the number of people or groups involved, conflict is to be expected. Yet, it is not the disagreements and conflict *per se* that are the root of destructive relations but rather the ways in which individuals or groups approach such differences.

In social psychological writings, conflict has been defined as a perceived incompatibility of actions or goals (Myers, 1990). For example, one group says "we want peace and security" and another says "so do we but you threaten us." Perceptions may be accurate or inaccurate but are often based on presumptions that one side's gain is the other's loss. Conflict can hinder human potentials but it can also stimulate growth.

Under the assumption that understanding the causes of conflict would lead to a more rational approach to its resolution, social psychological studies investigate the various aspects of conflict. Social traps, perceived injustices, competition, and social misperceptions have been identified as some of the major igniters of conflict. Although conflicts are readily kindled by these factors, there are also factors that can transform hostility into harmony.

The study of peace and peacemaking is a major area of interest for the same researchers who have looked into issues of conflict. In its most positive sense, peace is defined as "more than the suppression of open conflict, more than a tense, fragile, surface calmness...the outcome of a creatively managed conflict, one in which the parties reconcile their perceived differences and reach genuine accord" (Myers, 1990).

Four determinants of peace have been identified: contact, cooperation, communication and conciliation. Contact refers to the decrease in hostility when people come in close contact under positive circumstances, usually cooperative intergroup endeavors. Communication refers to the manner in which conflicting parties seek to resolve their differences by bargaining either directly with one another or through a third-party mediator. In situations where genuine communication is impossible, because of extreme tensions, small conciliatory gestures by one party may elicit reciprocal moves by the other party. Thus, tension is reduced to a level that allows communication.

In response to the problem of protracted armed conflict between the New People's Army (NPA) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), initiatives have been undertaken by citizens themselves to ensure that they do not become passive victims of militarization. The insurgency conflict has been a major enduring problem in the Philippines. Experimental approaches and strategies have been applied to resolve this conflict, with only minimal success. One such experimental strategy is the concept of peace zones delineated by people in various areas. One interest of this paper is to explore and analyze the concept as an alternative approach to conflict resolution.

People in various places have declared peace zones because they have become victims of the armed conflict, either because of actual casualties in their midst, or indirectly through forced dehumanizing evacuations. Peace zones are initiated by citizens as an emphatic assertion of their basic rights and authority. The residents, refusing to be further intimidated by armed hostilities, assert their right to a peaceful environment.

All the five original declared peace zones are thriving and some have even expanded to other areas. New peace zones are being declared, the most recent being Irosin, Sorsogon. The declaration of peace zones concerns not just the cessation of armed hostilities but also, more importantly, the economic and social well-being of the residents. For example, in Tulunan, North Cotabato, residents of the four adjacent peace zones have already set up an Inter-Peace Zones Development Council to address common economic and social concerns and to establish a mechanism for a common development plan for the four barangays. This is in recognition of the fact that there can be no peace without social justice.

The prolonged armed conflict between the NPA and the AFP has also generated theoretical reconsiderations of the role of the State. One model defines the State as the “protective association” for the whole territory and describes the AFP and the NPA as competitors for the allegiance of the population in certain geographical areas. Whoever gains the allegiance of the particular population will become the protective agency, so to speak, of that region.

Essentially, the peace zones imply that the community is better served if neither the AFP nor the NPA becomes the predominant protective agency in the region. The people themselves want to secure their perimeter by “moral defenses” rather than weapons of war. Peace zones thus represent, among other things, an indictment of arms and violence.

The traditional view of the State grants it a monopoly of the means of coercion (courts, laws, punishment, etc.) and establishes these institutions of coercion as necessities. By creating zones where citizens maintain order by way of persuasion and compassion rather than coercion, the sources of power of those who claim legitimate authority are indicted.

These zones of peace therefore represent not just a resistance to weapons of war but, indirectly a different view of political institutions, which are not necessarily alien or alienating but can instead advance a sort of social affinity. Political structures are being recreated and redefined. The basis for social and political ties are not derived from earlier discourses, but are created and defined anew by the people as they confront new and different social dilemmas.

In establishing peace zones, communities are questioning whether the military, a State apparatus, is actually working for their benefit. Apparently, they do not trust the military nor any other armed group. At the same time there is recognition, at least by some, that they must deal with a larger bureaucracy, and that, given the rhetoric of social development and people empowerment, government officials can be goaded into working towards social amelioration programs and projects. Nonetheless, people remain apprehensive about the coercive aspect of the military. It is a two-bladed sword. On one hand the military can protect the civilians from undue harm by fighting the enemies of the State, although it often hurts the very people it is supposed to protect. On the other hand, people are attracted to smaller and

more communal units in reaction to the sense of anonymity or alienation that accompanies large bureaucracies and nation-states.

While it may be true that some conflict can benefit individuals and groups because it generates the needed ingenuity and resolve to surmount the conflict, generally more creativity and conviviality is generated in an atmosphere of cooperation than of antagonism. While conflict may be a pervasive and ubiquitous condition it does not seem "normal" which is not to say that conflict must always be avoided, but only that in conflict situations, individuals and groups may not feel they are at their best, nor do they feel secure enough to give free rein to their creativity, ingenuity and mutual affection.

Conflict is not always undesirable although it may not be as fulfilling and advantageous as mutually cooperative relationships. Hence there is a preference for cooperative ties for individuals to be fully free and joyful.

There is also the belief that the real resolution of various social conflict cannot come from armed combat. It is only through dialogue and discussion that substantive resolutions can emerge. Hence it must be through the negotiating table, or through honest and in-depth dialogue, that a meeting of minds on questions of importance can occur.

These realizations are not mere theoretical speculations but observations gathered through concrete and even life-threatening experience. The communities studied were galvanized by the violence in their midst. When the communities reach the collective resolve that they want to declare a peace zone, something akin to collective *gestalt*, or collective change of consciousness, occurs. And the community members are bound to each other qualitatively so that they never actually perceive nor experience phenomena in quite the same way as before the moment of collective resolve. That is why, in a sense, it becomes difficult for outsiders to fully understand how they currently perceive their community.

The armed conflict has, in a manner of speaking, forced communities into cooperative relationships as the necessary means of survival. This is not a totally negative situation as it has made individuals realize that there is a larger community to consider. Thus the reality of a larger ethos is made possible.

The dramatic efforts in declaring and maintaining peace zones demonstrate that people are taking independent initiatives to settle the armed conflict and they are not just waiting for the national leadership to initiate these peaceful resolutions of the armed conflict.

All the peace zones realize that peace without justice is temporary and unstable, hence all the peace zones connect their efforts at cessation of hostilities with socioeconomic improvements. This is particularly true in rural peace zones, where the economic situation is precarious. Various social development agencies help with the economic amelioration efforts of these peace zones.

At this point it must be said that the peace zones are fragile in the sense that they subsist primarily because of moral suasion, because the military feels that they are to its advantage (although the military can take away this prerogative anytime). The civilians organize themselves to prevent the entry of any armed group, which the military accepts even if, from a certain standpoint, this challenges the prerogative (which the military holds dear) to enter any domain for as long as deemed necessary to protect territorial integrity and other interests of the State. This prerogative can be abused of course. Since the record of the military's protection of civilian rights is basically suspect, the civilians may justifiably prefer to protect themselves while negotiating with the NPA not to enter their zone, rather than waiting for the military to secure the areas for them.

The peace zones are externally vulnerable since they can always be physically attacked and since their "weapons" are persuasive and moral in nature it is only to the extent that armed aggressors can be persuaded to desist from military aggression and to respect the peace zone, do the zones have any force. But the peace zones are earnest grassroots efforts that assign the people an active role in the peacekeeping efforts because after all it is they who are the victims, as well as the ultimate beneficiaries of whatever peace may be achieved.

The peace zone process is ongoing so this report reflects only a slice in time in the life of the zones. At this point, the peace zones bear witness more to the fact that citizens have taken the initiative to declare peace within their communities and enforce these declarations by suggesting protocols for armed groups to follow. It cannot yet be said that they have effectively si-

lenced the weapons of war but their outcry represents a plea for rationality and a reassertion of humanity. The peace zones have also proposed that their communities become venues for dialogue and the peaceful resolution of armed conflict. Sagada leaders, for example, once mentioned to national leaders that if finding a venue for the negotiations between the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the Republic of the Philippines (RP) proved difficult they could hold the talks in Sagada.

The peace zones are also saying that beyond the ideological rhetoric and the appeal to ideal principles, in which the armed combatants engage themselves, the struggle to assert these principles are killing people. While the principles themselves may be laudable, the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries insist that they do not want to be sacrificed or victimized in the struggle for freedom and liberation. Indeed the peace zone builders are exemplary in their courage.

Meanwhile, the armed combatants must recognize that neither side can totally defeat the other, so the current strategy is to maintain the offensive as much as possible to create the semblance of success. Yet, the public mood is one of war fatigue. Filipinos are tired of the armed conflict and wish for a rational and peaceful resolution.

Within the context of the national predicament of resolving the ongoing armed conflict between the NPA and the AFP, the peace zones provide a partial and tentative answer, but one which definitely works in favor of the people of these communities. Whether such a resolution will find acceptance among the armed protagonists and inspire them to use their presumed might to serve the people remains doubtful. But peace zones at least provide a clue as to how the people, left to themselves, might seek answers to the predicament. In the process, perhaps they are also developing models of new communities.

The Concept of Peace Zones

After 21 years of being caught in an insurgency war and with no end in sight, a few communities in the war zones have taken initiative to declare their regions as peace zones.

A peace zone is a geographical area within which armed conflict is not allowed to occur. It may range in size from a sitio to whole province. The peace zone is an area-based, community initiated, nonviolent approach to armed conflict. In essence, it includes a people-initiated cease-fire where armed combatants are called upon to withdraw forces and operations from the peace zone. A community becomes a peace zone through a unilateral declaration. In some cases, the declaration is accompanied by a set of guidelines, community structures or mechanisms for specific peace-building tasks such as: (1) consultation with the community and decision-making on the people's peace agenda; (2) liaison/ negotiation/ dialogue with armed combatants; (3) monitoring of combatants' activities to ensure adherence to Peace Zone guidelines; and (4) information dissemination. (Office of the Peace Commissioner, 1992)

In psychological research on conflict and conflict resolution, conflict resolution efforts are typically undertaken by the major protagonists in a conflict. The peace zone concept is therefore unique in that it is an initiative taken by a group not directly involved in the conflict. The peace zone effort is, in a sense, a desperate survival strategy taken by those victims caught in the crossfire of the armed combatants.

In the Philippine insurgency war, peaceful conflict resolution is not necessarily perceived as being in the best interests of the armed groups. To both the NPA and the AFP, conflict may be resolved only when one group has prevailed and overwhelmed the other. Such a win-lose, zero-sum outlook can only escalate hostilities, although both the NPA and the AFP have come to realize that neither can totally defeat the other.

Methodology

Two methodological strategies were used to arrive at a better understanding of the peace zone concept in the Philippines. The first approach involved reviewing the documents on the peace zones at the Coalition for Peace and the Office of the Peace Commissioner. When available, the documents in the possession of the peace zone proponents were also examined. Through the documents search, the various peace zones were compared in terms of their inception, maintenance, and problems encountered.

A second strategy involved site visits and discussions with some of the key players in the peace zone process. Thus these authors were able to observe firsthand some of the results of the peace zone process and obtain personal accounts of the process from informants.

Results and Findings

The Naga Experience

Naga City is the commercial/industrial center of Camarines Sur, the largest province in the Bicol Region. It has a multi-ethnic population of approximately 150,000 distributed in 27 barangays. The city thrives despite its being in the Bicol area, which ranks second among the country's most under-developed areas. Some 400 or 36 percent of NPA armed regulars in the Bicol region supposedly operate in Camarines Sur. Encounters occur frequently in the area although Naga City itself has been spared from most of the violence.

According to documents from the Office of the Peace Commissioner, there was public uproar in early 1988 over a series of armed encounters between government forces and the NPAs in the city's suburbs and nearby towns. The NPA had previously admitted to a spate of bombings that destroyed bridges and main roads in 1987. In response, the Naga Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) was declared during the Peñafrancia Feast in September 1988.

The Peñafrancia feast is a big traditional celebration in the city, during which a fluvial parade draws devotees from within the city as well as countless visitors and tourists. Violence and other disruptions are thus particularly unwelcome during this period.

The declaration was made by the Hearts of Peace (HOPE)-Naga, a multisectoral coalition of cause-oriented people's organizations and social development agencies. The Naga Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) was later formally declared in Resolution No. 89-021, a joint advocacy by the mayor and the group, HOPE in February 1989. Camarines Sur Governor Luis Villafuerte also endorsed the peace zone concept.

Interviews with key participants in the Naga peace zone concept revealed how the idea was developed. One respondent said that the idea of peace and how to attain it came to several people at different times. Cesar Belangel, for example, was interested in the concept of resolving the problem of violence, as far back as 1987 when a co-worker at the Social Action Center was liquidated and the NPA later acknowledged responsibility for the liquidation. "We were hit directly by an experience of...we're trying to find a venue where we can understand...we can do something about that..." So when, in 1987, a group was initiated by Jean Llorin of the Coalition for Peace to discuss means of resolving the conflict, these various people naturally gravitated towards each other. Thus was born Task Force Peace (TFP).

The Catholic Church, mainly through Monsignor Alberto Nero who was director of the Social Action Center at that time, played an important role at the start of the process. Msgr. Nero convened the first meetings and provided the venue, the Social Action Office. He downplayed his involvement, however, by saying that he just happened to know most of the interested participants who were also active Church members. He did admit, though, that "when this movement for peace came out, it was...a development...of...the work we have been doing on active nonviolence." Msgr. Nero left the peace advocacy when he had to go on an extended leave in order to have heart surgery. The role of the Church in the peace advocacy was further diminished when the movement was inaccurately branded as leftist and Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi forbade his workers from participating in any group activities as representatives of their church groups. They could still, however, participate in their individual capacities.

TFP was a parallel organization to the HOPE. Although there were many common members, the leadership of each aggrupation was different. TFP did not lead to HOPE. TFP's objectives were: (1) to campaign for the ratification of the 1987 Constitution; (2) to work for the peace process (cease-fire and peace talks); and (3) to act as an anti-coup movement. Lawyer Soliman "Sol" Santos, Jr. was an active member of HOPE. Sol Santos said that the coalition was formed so "we could more effectively push for more (people) to address the peace issue. Although at that time *hindi pa ganoon ka*-defined *yung* peace, the general idea or connotation had something to do with cessation of hostilities." He also admitted that the peace zone idea really came from the Coalition for Peace.

The initial conditions of the peace zone proposal included bilateral cease-fire between the military and the local rebel forces, a ban on the carrying of firearms within the city, dismantling of private armies and paramilitary forces (including vigilante groups or Sparrow liquidation units), sanctuary for wounded combatants, rest and recreation for combatants, institutionalizing the zone for pluralism and dialogue (Office of the Peace Commissioner, 1992).

To draw support for the ZOPFAN, an information/ education/ poster campaign was launched. The support of various nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and Church groups was solicited through fora, dialogues, symposia, and multisectoral consultations spearheaded by HOPE. A street play and concert for peace were performed. (Incidentally, it was one of these types of activities that led to the alienation of the Catholic Church from the movement.) A Cease-fire Committee and People's Peace Council were conceptualized but were not implemented. Barangays were encouraged to declare "mini-peace zones."

Initial public response to the peace zone concept was encouraging. The NPA provincial command also answered favorably to the call through letters of support for HOPE's various peace activities. The AFP, in contrast, remained unreceptive to the proposal although local authorities, including the Naga City Mayor and the Governor of Camarines Sur, supported the plan.

Sol Santos provided the information that at some point, there was an exchange of ideas through position papers submitted by the Philippine National Police/Armed Forces of the Philippines (PNP/AFP) and the NPA. Although the AFP was not totally convinced on the peace zone idea, they participated in the exchange, aired some of their objections and suggested counter-proposals to the peace zone. Jose "Joe" Grageda, another key informant, also mentioned holding discussions with Colonel Victor "Vic" Mayo of the Philippine Army. He added that relations with the PNP and AFP always depended to some extent on the person sitting in the top position. "*Siguro depende rin sa leadership kung minsan sa mga officials ng military. At least ngayon, maganda-ganda ang kalagayan with Vic Mayo and the previous provincial commander...Pero there were times naman kasi na yung nakaupo diyan...masyado bang mabagsik...*"

Interviews with the PNP provincial director (in August 1992), Senior Superintendent Renato Paredes, and Col. Mayo of the Philippine Army yielded some insights into the position of the police and the armed forces *vis-a-vis* the peace zone. Both officers insisted that military presence is definitely necessary to prevent the NPA from taking over.

Col. Mayo raised an interesting point that only highlights a wide perceptual differences between the military and the peace zone advocates when he asked, "The military is mandated to protect the people, why should we lay down our arms?" Both respondents shared the view that the only way peace could be achieved was to first wipe out the enemy (read "security") and provide the rest of the citizenry with better social conditions so they would not want to rebel (read "development"). One respondent, however, suggested that "between development and security, give priority to security."

Another insight provided by Col. Mayo regarding the reasons why the military did not support the peace zone was the hierarchical structure of their organization. The peace zone or any such concept must be referred to higher headquarters first and soldiers in the field must simply wait for formal directives before any action (*i.e.*, recognition) can be taken. The lower military echelons, particularly the soldier in the field, cannot make an independent assessment without clearance from the military strategists or policy-makers.

Some of the other reservations and doubts held by the military about the peace zone were: "the peace zone is a means of allowing freedom to those who don't have it; the peace zone is a means of making the army give up something; why tell defenders to go wherever when they're mandated to defend people...they should be allowed to go wherever." There really is no need for the peace zone since if "they (the NPA) do nothing, we do nothing."

Since January 1991, HOPE continued to meet but the campaign for the ZOPFAN was not sustained. Problems of maintaining the coalition can be cited as one of the reasons. Leadership and initiative tended to emanate from only one person and, after so much effort, what kept the group together was still not strong enough to sustain the effort. As a result, advocacy for the peace zone ceased. Although both the Naga City Mayor and *Sangguniang Panglunsod* support it, they depended on HOPE to campaign for its imple-

mentation. One reason provided by Sol Santos as to why the peace zone advocacy was halted is that the three major component blocks of HOPE have become NGOs and the leaders have become very preoccupied with their NGO work. Interest in the peace zone seems to have waned.

Sol Santos, the energetic leader looked up to by everybody else to provide the initiatives and major moves, reveals perhaps a degree of burnout when he says, "...I gave it my all *na*...maybe, others should try to do something about it..." In the next breath, however, he again waxes enthusiastic about the gains of the peace zone and its potentials. He admits that HOPE has been undergoing an organizational process since December 1991, to revive the coalition, but this has likewise not been sustained. There are definite difficulties in maintaining a multisectoral and ideologically pluralistic coalition.

At the time of the interviews (August 1992), the researchers were invited to a meeting attended by a few of the HOPE members to assess current status, evaluate past gains and discuss an uncertain future. There is definitely an interest in reviving the peace zone but the sense of urgency is missing. There is also the issue of how the peace zone concept will relate to ongoing peace initiatives at the national level.

In 1993 as the Ramos government initiated peace talks with armed groups of the Left and the Right, the Naga City Council passed a resolution asking for both sides to come to a peaceful agreement, and reiterating the character of Naga City as a peace zone, where the protagonists can meet in dialogue.

After the Ramos government launched its peace initiative, the Naga Peace Zone was relaunched after being inactive for about two years. This time the initiative came from the City Council that invited the representatives of the regional commands of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the National Democratic Front (NDF), the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) and the Young Officers Union (YOU), to meet with the City Government of Naga and discuss and guarantee the resolution by the City Council declaring the city of Naga as a peace zone. Furthermore, the City Council sought to discuss and settle local problems, which have no national implications and therefore need no intervention of national leadership of each organization. The City Council also recommended an agenda for the Bicol

region should peace talks at the national level be held.

One observation that may be made about the Naga Peace Zone concept is its highly “cognitive” nature. Everybody was aware of the need for a peace zone and efforts were concentrated on expanding awareness of the importance of peace. There was, however, no immediate effect of the awareness campaign. As Sol Santos put it, the “peace zone was not a felt need in the community since there was really no *bakbakan* here.” While they understood cognitively the need for a peace zone, there was no sense of urgency as the Naga City residents were not caught in the crossfire of the armed combatants and violence was limited to the suburbs and outskirts of Naga. This lack of immediacy plus the large and scattered population of the city may have impeded a more successful Naga peace zone. Some people would say that the Naga people should be lauded for even wanting to declare a peace zone when there was no actual fighting in their midst. This suggests a “higher” level of consciousness that recognizes the need for the actualization of abstract principles without having to be victimized.

Naga City has a tradition of discussion and debate. It has a park called Plaza Libertad, styled after Hyde Park in London, where whoever wants to expound on a given topic, or discuss with others any issue of importance, may do so. The fact that the peace zone was launched during the Peñafrancia festival was also significant because the *Ina* (as the Lady of Peñafrancia is called) was petitioned as the patroness of peace. And when the *Ina* is solicited people truly believe that she will respond. Hence there is a certain cohesion and level of organization among the people which is somewhat unique among the Bicolanos. While there was no direct experience of bloodbath, the people of Naga were concerned about peace. Naga, being an important center in the Bicol region, had to make a stand. Even after the peace zone grew inactive, the general sentiment among “concerned citizens” to remain a peace zone still lives.

The Cantomanyog Experience

The Cantomanyog peace zone experience contrasts sharply with the Naga case. In Cantomanyog, citizens had to address the harsh reality of violence or perish.

Cantomanyog is a small sitio of 47 families in Barangay Haba in

Candoni, Negros Occidental. The area is part of the CHICKS (C-auayan, H-imamaylan, I-log, C-andoni, K-abankalan and S-ipalay) area, identified as stronghold towns of insurgency since the celebration in March 1989. The NPA presence is strongly felt and was once the dominant force in the area. Sipalay, the neighboring town, was at one point declared a liberated zone by the NPA. In and around Candoni, the NPA launched their own agrarian reform program, distributing land to various landless tenants. To counter this force, the military launched its own offensive leading to the heavy militarization of the area.

A key incident that eventually led to the declaration of the peace zone was the April 18, 1989 NPA attack on the 7th Infantry Battalion, Alpha Company detachment at Camingay, Candoni. The attack subsequently paved the way for the launching in May 1989 of 'Operation Thunderbolt,' a massive military mobilization directed at the surrounding sitios of Candoni whose residents were forced to evacuate their communities and live in cramped school-houses in Barangay Haba for months while the military was "flushing out" the insurgents in the area.

The people of Cantomanyog reluctantly left their sitio. In the school-house at Barangay Haba, they suffered privation and lack of food. Many children were dying of various diseases because of unsanitary conditions and congested space. The mothers, seeing children dying around them, feared that their own children might be next. Somehow, the children from Cantomanyog were spared, which people deemed a blessing. "*Kon ginpabayaan kami guro sang Ginoo, damo na kabuhi sang kabataan ang ma ula pero...ginpadayon namon ang rosary kag panimbahon bisan sa EC (evacuation center). Kag dira nabatyagan namon ang espiritu sang Ginoo ginatury-tuyan kami kag nabagayat namon na ang Ginoo nagupod. Wala ya kami ginapaybay-an*" (Had God abandoned us, many children's lives would have been lost but...we continued praying the rosary and doing the *panimbahon* at EC. And there we felt the spirit of God guiding us. For He never really forsook us" (Interview with Inday Corazon Elesio, quoted from Tison and Gregorio, 51).

Piety came naturally to the people of Cantomanyog ever since Father Rolando "Rolex" Nueva returned to Candoni in 1985 to rebuild the Basic Christian Communities (BCC) that were started years before by Irish Columban priests and nuns. The BCCs grew discreet when the military became suspicious that they were pro-Communist. The BCC or *Kristiyanong*

Katilingban, particularly the regular *panimbahon* or Bible-sharing and prayer sessions, managed to survive in Cantomanyog. People from Cantomanyog are particularly close, perhaps because they are migrants from Iloilo or *tinabokanons*, speculated one of the pioneer nuns of the BCC, Sister Anto. For instance, the system of *dagyaw* or voluntary and cooperative labor was particularly strong among the people of Cantomanyog.

It was the experience though of being evacuees in Baraṅgay Haba that brought the people of Cantomanyog closer to one another. 'Rather than quarrel... people in artificially-contrived and enforced environments were wont to do, the people of Cantomanyog experienced a new and stronger sense of solidarity' (Tison and Gregorio, 52). As one paradoxically reported "*Kon wa-ay siguro bakwet, wa-ay siguro...ang mga tawo naglapitay..Kay ang kapiot kag ang situation man didto, naghugot...sa isa kag isa....*" (Had there been no evacuation...the people would never have experienced the kinship they feel for each other now, because it was the deprivation and the misery we felt there that bound us together. Certainly, in my case I feel much closer to each one of them now" (*ibid.*).

After two months in the evacuation center, the Cantomanyog people were permitted to return to their land. In August 1989 families decided to return to Cantomanyog but many families either stayed with relatives in Candoni or went back to Iloilo.

It was the pain of being driven from their land that finally compelled the people of Cantomanyog to devise a solution to their plight. Also, a rumor mentioned by several key informants such as Fr. Rolex, Inday Corazon Elesio, and Marianito "Tio Nonit" Apolinario that another military operation might be launched after Operation Thunderbolt heightened their apprehensions and pushed the people to act. There was also a hit list identifying fifteen men from Cantomanyog which was floated presumably to scare away the residents. It was this threat to their land which also played a decisive role in the residents decision to stay and assert their claims to the land. "*Amo na nga nagtinguha gid kag nagtindog kami nga indi na kami mag-evacuate bisan ano pa ang matabu. Diri na lang sa amon nga lugar. Kay kon mag-evacuate ka, amo man guihapon, mabudlayan ka. Nagamalasakit kag mabudlayan ka pagka on. Diri na lang kami sa uma namon.*" (That is why we resolved never to evacuate again no matter what. We will stay in our places. For if we evacuate, we will be troubled just the same. We will get sick and we will have problems with

food. We will just stay in our farms.)

A series of tumultuous events led to the barricade of the Negros Island Peace Caravan, which was organized by the Negros priests and PENTECOST-Negros. They were on their way to the Cantomanyog area, in Barangay Haba, when they reached a standoff between the military, church officials and the partisan crowd and established the principles of the Zone of Peace in Cantomanyog formally declared on February 16, 1990. (Although the Cantomanyog community already had their own launching ceremony on December 26, 1989.) The key figures in the formal declaration included the local parish priest, Fr. Rolando "Rolex" Nueva, Msgr. Antonio Fortich and local community leaders like Inday Corazon Elesio, Manay Consor Apolinario, and Marianito "Nonit" Apolinario; and various individuals associated with the Bacolod-based group, Bulig Foundation. Some support was provided by the Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute through the Coalition for Peace and a Bacolod-based group called the *Pag-hili-usa sa Paghidaet*.

The peace zone proposal stipulated that, among other things, the NPA, AFP, and other armed groups could not bring their deadly weapons or firearms with them when entering the zone. The zone was declared open only to those with 'good intentions.' An executive committee was set up to implement the Peace Zone (PZ) conditions. Initially, this group was envisioned to have seven members, three from the community and two each from the NPA and the AFP. However, due to problems in enlisting the full cooperation of the armed combatants who saw the peace zone as inimical to their group's interests, the committee was eventually composed of five local community leaders. An appeal for respect of the declaration and an announcement of PZ guidelines was issued to all government agencies.

As in Naga, the military based in Negros Island expressed the same reservations regarding the Cantomanyog peace zone. Major David "Dave" Sabido, army spokesman, had this to say: "We're strongly against the peace zone. Why? Because the peace zone proponents want us to believe that all armed elements are not allowed inside. First, okay, granted that arms must be left outside before entering the peace zone. But here the other side would be more favorable towards such an arrangement. It's because the peace zone can actually become a sanctuary of the other side. And this is in fact what happened in Cantomanyog. Second, it would amount to the government abdicating its right to police a part of its territory. Why off limits? Is it private property? Assuming that it is cooperative, the peace zone aids not only the

armed elements but also their political machinery. In short, it prevents the military from carrying out its duty." He did admit, however, that the army has no official policy regarding peace zones.

Despite the lack of an official policy on peace zones, Major Sabido claimed that they treated Cantomanyog residents "with maximum tolerance." He complained, however, that "we end up playing *patintero* where if the rebels reached 'base' we could no longer get at them anymore. Police power is lost and this makes the government ineffective."

Since January 1990, there have been no reports of armed encounters in the area. However, there have been occasional violations by both the NPA and the AFP groups who entered the area with firearms. The community closely monitors such violations and reasserts their appeal to the armed groups to respect their peace zone declaration. Fewer violations were reported, the longer the zone was in place.

One critical incident that contributed to the perceived importance of the Cantomanyog peace zone was the community's facilitation of the peaceful surrender of a Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) regular who had gone AWOL (absent without leave) and sought refuge in the community. The surrender provided an opening for peace negotiations with the military in 1991. Short of endorsing the peace zone, the local military opted to take a live-let-live attitude with the peace zone and was relatively cooperative, even more so than the NPA.

The Cantomanyog peace zone was endorsed by the Candoni Municipal Board to the Negros Occidental Provincial Board in a resolution. There is tacit support from some provincial leaders but not too overt to offend military sensibilities. Community leaders and the NPA also engaged in dialogue but the official NPA response is still vague and tenuous. Other developments in the peace zone include livelihood projects facilitated by the local church and nongovernmental organizations. The Office of the Peace Commissioner also made a series of visits to monitor peace activities and liaise with local government officials regarding the concerns of the community.

In the assessment of the Office of the Peace Commissioner, the Cantomanyog peace zone remains the most problematic among the peace zones for the following reasons: (1) residents from the outlying areas of

Barangay Haba are opposed to the peace zone; (2) both the military and the NPA strongly resist the concept of a peace zone; and (3) lack of actual support from the provincial government despite official pronouncements.

From another perspective though, the Cantomanyog peace zone might actually be a model because of the unity of the people and the success with which they have been able to prevent armed groups from entering the area. More importantly, because of their collective efforts several projects have already been implemented in the area like a water system, a cooperative store, a more active health program emphasizing herbal medicine.

Unlike in Naga, however, the Cantomanyog peace zone enjoys more support from the local church and Bishop Antonio Fortich strongly endorsed the initiative. At the time of the interviews (September 1992), the executive committee was scheduled to meet and discuss with newly-elected Governor Rafael Coscolluela the future of their peace zone.

In February 1993, the zone celebrated its second anniversary. The area is relatively peaceful. Though not endorsed by either the military or the NPA, both armed groups appear to practice a live-let-live attitude towards the people of the peace zone. The people themselves appear to have internalized the peace zone mechanism which is strongly founded in their faith and the Basic Christian Community setting. Though not without problems, the members of the community appear determined to cope.

(The Aurora Quezon Peace Award for 1993 was given to the community of Cantomanyog.)

The Sagada Experience

Sagada, a town of about 15,000 people in 19 barangays, is located 275 kilometers north of Manila. It is landlocked by mountain ranges such as the Cordillera and has poor transportation and communication systems. It is situated fairly close to identified NPA posts.

The Sagada peace zone was established as a response to violent incidents. While the armed conflict between the military and the NPA had been raging for years near or around Sagada, it was only when the war reached the

poblacion of the town that the townspeople rose up in protest.

On October 27, 1988, Army soldiers came to occupy the municipal hall. After receiving their pay, the soldiers became drunk and fired indiscriminately. Two minors were killed, a four-year-old boy and a 17-year-old college student.

The following day, October 28, a public condemnation rally was held in the town center. The soldiers transferred to the elementary school, disrupting classes.

On November 11, the NPA attacked the school building in an hour-long nighttime gunfire. A 12-year-old boy was killed and a young girl was injured. Witnesses say the bullet that killed the boy came from the direction of the NPA.

At a town meeting shortly after, the residents issued a strongly worded resolution calling for both forces to withdraw from Sagada and to recognize the town as a demilitarized zone. This plea for the demilitarization of Sagada (the idea of calling it a peace zone came later) and its declaration was made with the participation of prominent citizens including Mayor Dao-as, Vice-Mayor Tom Killip, the *Sangguniang Bayan*, the Sagada Community Development Council (with J. Solong as chairman), the local Episcopal Church, and the tribal elders.

The conditions in the Peace Zone declaration included a total withdrawal of all armed groups, safe conduct for the wounded, removal of all armed detachments, and peace negotiations. There was to be no more harassment, intimidation, illegal arrests and searches, torture and killing of suspects. Fighting and the carrying of firearms inside was not allowed. Civilian interests would take priority at all times, democratic institutions would be protected, and customs and traditions respected. Violations of the peace zone conditions would be documented and denounced. Socioeconomic developments would be encouraged.

A Municipal Peace Committee (MPC) was formed, composed of recognized leaders in the community, coming from different political orientations representing different sectors. The MPC had to be different from the

Municipal Council so that the MPC would not be identified with the government, according to Vice-Mayor Killip.

The consensus to appeal to both sides for a demilitarized area came as a result of various community meetings. The people wanted a demilitarized zone so that they could carry out their daily activities without fear of being hurt. During community meetings various barangays, *dap-ays* and other informal groupings raised ideas that were then gathered to form a community consensus.

The traditional clan councils, the *dap-ays*, played an important role in establishing this consensus, as one of their specific functions is conflict resolution. The *dap-ay* is a mechanism for dialogue or discussion, and even facilitates regular and "ritualized" exchange of ideas and views, within set parameters. The *dap-ay* was (is) the traditional sociopolitical system that mediates among individuals, groups and communities, and even between humans and deities (the spirits and nature). Because of this tradition of having an accepted forum for exchange, the Sagada community is fairly close-knit. There is definitely a sense of belonging to the community, even if differences exist among beliefs, political orientations and ideological leanings. On the whole, there is a shared sense of being part of the same "tribe."

The Municipal Peace Committee was not initiated by the Municipal Council. During the conceptualization stage there was no contact yet with outside agencies. Later, the Coalition for Peace and the Peace Commission helped facilitate communication with various government agencies, including the Department of National Defense.

By December 1988, the various community meetings were conducted and in the New Year, the Sagada position was brought to both armed groups. In late January 1989, the NPA responded positively on the condition that the AFP should do likewise. Discussions were held with the NPA provincial leadership. The NPA pulled out from near the center of the town. The military did not reply formally but *de facto* respected the declaration. Several weeks later, two companies of soldiers encamped on a Sagada hill followed suit and transferred to a neighboring town, after a dialogue between the community, the military, and the Peace Commission. (Hadlock:31).

The declaration was recognized 'in principle' by both the AFP and

the NPA but with reservations. The Sagada Peace Zone (PZ) was cited by then Defense Secretary Fidel V. Ramos as the prototype for local-level peace processes in 1990. Since March 1989, six documented encounters and violations by both armed combatants have been reported and addressed. Thereafter, whenever the military wanted to enter Sagada they would request formal permission from the town officials. But even without formal negotiations with both armed groups, the community seemed to have established the desired state of peace by firmly stating what its demands were to the armed protagonists.

At some stage of the demilitarized zone, Secretary Ramos declared Sagada a model of peace zones for other towns to emulate. A delegation from Sagada, together with representatives of the Coalition for Peace and the Peace Commission, went to Camp Crame and talked with Secretary Ramos himself.

Later, the attitude of the military changed. The military strategists of the AFP somehow considered the Sagada peace zone as a mechanism designed by leftists in the community to give the NPA an edge, that the peace zone had played into the NPA's hands. In 1991, the AFP overran an NPA camp in Mount Sisipitan, which is a day's hike from Sagada and which Sagadans do not normally consider to be part of their town. The presence of the NPA camp in Mount Sisipitan, which the AFP labeled as the regional headquarters of the NPA, was used as an argument also to overrun Sagada and deploy a military contingent there. The media projection of Sagada as a peace zone became negative. In a speech in Baguio on October 24, 1992, now President Ramos repeated General Lisandro Abadia's conclusion that Sagada is actually used by the NPA as sanctuary. President Ramos seems to listen more to military perceptions than those of civilians.

Since February 1989, the demilitarized zone (it was only later that it was labeled a Peace Zone) was effective for three years. Both the AFP and the NPA could not enter Sagada. While the situation was not completely perfect, because of violations by both sides, the general atmosphere was what the community wanted. During those three years there were still encounters but outside, near or close to Sagada but not within the poblacion. The demilitarization could not cover the entire town so only four barangays of the poblacion were covered.

The NPA, "the other part" of Sagada adopted an active defense stance, they will not attack but they will defend themselves if attacked.

The *de facto* recognition by the military of the demilitarized zone could be inferred from military correspondence asking permission from the Municipal Council for permission to enter Sagada. Colonel Mariano, for example, would do this. In private discussions the local military would be sympathetic to the concept but its public response would be ambiguous.

The Municipal Peace Committee also thought that Sagada could be a place for peaceful negotiations between the NDF and the national government. The town has a history of being the site of political meetings. It hosted the NDF-CPDF (Cordillera People's Democratic Front) Political Congress before 1987 during the cease-fire. Antonio Zumel represented the NDF.

At one time, Sagada was being considered a showcase of what communities could do regarding the armed conflict. Various government officials visited the town. Because of its being well-organized, Sagada was the only town which was declared a **Special Development Area** and many government projects were planned for implementation. But the enthusiasm did not last.

The Municipal Peace Committee acquired a reputation for being able to mediate with the NPA. One incident involved itinerant salesmen, from Nueva Vizcaya, roaming the countryside who were caught by the NPA and suspected of being military informers. A delegation from Sagada intervened and were able to have the salesmen released.

Later, after a daring attack on the Philippine Constabulary (PC) garrison in Tadian, the NPA held eleven PC soldiers as hostages. The military would not negotiate with the NPA. The families of the hostages sought the help of the Sagada peace committee. After weeks of negotiations, the NPA finally released the PC soldiers to the Sagada peace committee. Together with other local officials, including the Governor, the Sagada people were to turn over the PC soldiers to their families in Bontoc. The military wanted the PC soldiers turned over to them for debriefing, but the women of Bontoc spontaneously became a human barricade to stop the military from being able to get the soldiers. Instead, the released hostages went with their families. There was a standoff between the military on one side, and the local officials includ-

ing the Governor and the Bontoc women and other citizens, on the other. The delegation from Sagada became passive witness to the unfolding drama.

As a result of this fiasco, the provincial PC commander was relieved of his post. And with the change in military leadership, there was a subsequent change in the assessment of the situation, and a more aggressive military stance prevailed. In 1991, the 24th Infantry Battalion of the 702nd brigade was deployed in Sagada. Mount Sisipitan, viewed by residents as not belonging to Sagada, was reported as the site of an NPA training camp. Sagada denied any involvement but the military nevertheless recommended lifting the peace zone status of Sagada to then President Corazon C. Aquino.

Now the entire town, province and region are militarized. More than this, there is active propaganda against so-called Communist sympathizers, from the provincial governor down to some local officials and prominent citizens. Sagada people consider the military an occupying force.

Sagada is symbolic to both the New People's Army (and the Cordillera People's Democratic Front) and the military. Aside from the fact, common to many other places, that young men (and some women) from the town are in both the NPA and the military, Sagada itself has a certain reputation for being "rebel" territory even dating back to the Spanish times. It also has special significance because it is the heart of the *Kanka-ney* territory, and is a transit point between the Cordilleras and Abra.

The people of Sagada are divided over the presence of the military and the dismantling of the peace zone. Since the military camp is far from the town center, their presence is not so visible, except of course when they come into the poblacion to buy supplies. The CAFGUs, or alleged civilian armed militia, are more visible. From the authors' research, it was learned that the attitude of the NPA towards the CAFGUs, who are locals, is one of benign tolerance.

Army trucks are visible in the construction of a sports arena near the town center. This type of civic action programs is more acceptable to many citizens. There is still a palpable sense of apprehension though that the NPA could very well launch an attack again, because of the military presence in the town. In February 1993, the NPA celebrated an important occasion in one of the barangays of Sagada. A certain tension therefore constantly hangs in the air.

What are the immediate prospects for the Sagada peace zone? Those interviewed mentioned, among others, that:

1. The military should pull out from these areas. A military solution is acknowledged by most as not really the correct solution, and might even add up to the negative sentiments against the government.
2. Even if the military leaves, this does not mean that people will join the NPA, or will become more sympathetic to them. The community will still be discussing and will find it easier without outsiders. Sagada is a clannish society. People should be allowed to chart their own direction.

As a whole, the atmosphere in Sagada is despondent because the presence of the military has effectively shattered the peace zone. Sagada is significant because there the people demonstrated their capability to enforce the provisions on both the military and the NPA for a significant period of time. But precisely because of this, the military did not want the Sagada experience to be emulated. The military loses face because the people there demonstrated their resolve not to have the military within their midst. The presence of armed military men inside the poblacion does not really augur well for the retaliation by the Cordillera People's Liberation Army. And so there is an uneasy peace, and there is residual resentment among some of the prominent families, although there are also residents who favor the presence of the military.

The sentiments of the Cordillera People's Democratic Front (CPDF) towards the presence of the military in Sagada seems somewhat benign. For as long as they are not attacked, they will not risk a confrontation. Likewise, their attitude towards the CAGU is that, after the military leaves, they will not seek to harm these civilian volunteers but will just disarm them. This builds confidence and saves both sides from losing face when the demilitarization of Sagada occurs.

Some leaders of the town (Vice-Mayor Tom Killip, Reverend Alex Wandag, Doctor Andrew Tauli) are right in expressing dissatisfaction with how the military has in fact disregarded the wishes of the town's population by occupying an area contiguous to Sagada, as a demonstration of the State's power. The unexpressed desire is that soon the townspeople will enjoy a greater

sense of security by being allowed to police their own ranks and set their own boundaries, something they could do long before the establishment of the Republic.

The State's blatant violation of the peace zone in Sagada can be interpreted as a sign that attempts by the citizens to secure themselves will not be allowed, much less tolerated. Thankfully, while their spirits were dampened, the Sagada leaders were resolute in maintaining a peace zone. There is a desire to see the military leave Sagada so that the peace zone can be reestablished.

The Bituan Experience

Bituan is located 14 kilometers to the eastern portion of Tulunan in North Cotabato. The peace zone occupies a one kilometer radius of once barren land which has been transformed into a productive agricultural area through the efforts of government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the residents. The community that declared the peace zone consisted of about 160 families originating from three different places, Alimodian, Bituan and Lampagang. The families were displaced by the armed conflict between the NPA and the AFP.

The Bituan peace zone was a project of internal refugees who had been evacuated fourteen times since 1974. Initially these evacuations were a result of the Ilaga and Muslim conflict. The situation worsened when they were caught in between encounters between the military and the NPA. In August 1989, they again evacuated to escape military operations against the NPA. One hundred and thirty families stayed for nine months in an elementary school, sleeping in the classrooms at night, and staying outside during the day to make way for the classes. Conditions were very difficult and many children died. Food was scarce and assistance from outside sources was usually hindered by the military because they thought that some of the food might eventually go to the NPA.

In the evacuation center the people formed their own council, the Inter-Barangay Disaster Council, and wrote a peace zone declaration in their own language. By February 25, 1990 they called for a zone of peace, free from war, military presence or any other group. "They are in the countryside and they asserted that no more civilian should be forced to become CAFGUs..." (*Hadlok:31*).

The concept of the peace zone was initially conceived to be a "zone of life," as well as a "zone of light." In Alimodian, for example, they perceived the "zone of light" as different from but coincidental with "zone of peace." Much like Cantomanyog, the peace zone was to have no drugs nor alcohol and allow overall domestic peace. The sense of peace and security should exist innately among the residents of the community. This new arrangement would provide opportunities for prosperity or at least a decent life. New modes of social interaction were sampled, not from external sources of authority but from concepts developed within the community.

The Bituan Zone of Life was formally declared in February 1990 with the Joint Resolution No. 4 Series of 1989. The key players were residents of the barangay, the barangay council headed by Chair Max Casulocan, Jr. (who was later suspected by both the NPA and the military), the local Church as represented by the Bishop, government officials (the Congressman and the Provincial Governor), nongovernmental organizations, and the Office of the Peace Commissioner.

The peace zone declaration provided for a firearms ban, no entrance of armed groups, no firing of weapons, no threatening of civilians, enforcement of a liquor ban, no recruitment and deployment of paramilitary units (Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit/Civilian Volunteers Organization or CAFGU/CVO), and required permits for the use of public places.

Committees were assigned to monitor and report on activities within the peace zone; the internal monitoring committee composed of community leaders and the external monitoring committee composed of Church representatives, local government officials, NGO representatives and a representative of the Office of the Peace Commissioner.

Fifteen months after the peace zone declaration, Bituan remained relatively peaceful although initially there had been some tension between the people and the military suspicious of the peace zone. In 1991, an NPA ambush led to the deaths of several soldiers and civilians. The military asked for a dialogue and the Community Peace Commission was formed to avoid further ambushes. The NPA expressed sentiments in favor of the peace zone but refused a dialogue. Relations between the community and the military improved after the meeting. Other peace zones were subsequently set up in surrounding areas, in Sitio Alimodian of Barangay Banayal, Barangay Nabundasan, and Sitio Maitub of Barangay Tuburan.

The people drew enough political strength to sustain themselves and eventually prevail, according to one observer. The military opposed the peace zone, as did the Tuluunan mayor and other local officials who cooperate with the military. However, the governor of North Cotabato, Congressman Gregorio Andolana, the Church and some development NGOs, were supportive of the people. (In April 1993, another peace council was formed to "counter" this existing alliance between the Governor and the Congressman, and the people. This other council, composed of other local officials, was formed with much cooperation from the military.)

The Mindanao National Democratic Front was the first to recognize the peace zone when it issued a statement over the radio expressing respect for the people's initiative for peace. Apparently, it is easier for the local NDF or NPA, rather than the national organs, to recognize the peace zone, as demonstrated in Sagada and Bituan, perhaps because they know the people involved in the peace zone and have more contact with the situation.

After the peace zone in Bituan was declared, a neighboring barangay, Nabundasan, also declared itself a peace zone because it also did not want to become a battleground for the armed conflict. Another neighboring barangay, Tuburan, was split between those who were pro-CAFGUs and those who were against. Those who were anti-CAFGUs transferred homes to create a new sitio, Mai-tub (from Miag-ao-Tuburan), which was declared a peace zone. Those who were in Bituan came originally from Sitio Alimodian and sought to recreate their former sitio by transferring to a site near their old sitio, which they named New Alimodian. The people subsequently organized the Sitio New Alimodian Development Council (SNADC).

Through grants Alimodian constructed houses in the new sitio based on communal orientation and a sitio development plan with space allotted for houses, a sitio, a center, a cooperative building, farms and more. Sitio leaders were rather proud that their cooperative, intended for marketing and consumers, was thriving and useful not only to regular citizens but also to the *Lumads* (indigenous tribal people) who live nearby and sell their produce to the cooperative and also obtain supplies they need from it.

The people in the different barangays are solidly organized—they have farmers' organization and women's organization dating back to Martial

Law days, in addition to the cooperatives. They are trained in paralegal work (how to make affidavits, resolutions, etc.). Their skills and knowledge, honed through seminars and workshops were apparent during the planning workshop for the creation of the Inter-Peace Zone Coordinating Council (IPZCC). They facilitated their own discussions without any outsiders and drafted the concept paper which they would present to the General Assembly (the residents of all the different peace zones in Tuluhan) for ratification. It helps that there are farmer-leaders who have gone through many training programs. For instance, the barangay captain of Nabundasan, who was chosen to be the Chairman of the IPZCC, is a former seminarian.

Bishop Juan Pueblo de Dios of Kidapawan, North Cotabato, mentions that "the peace zone will only be successful and effective when the people themselves are organized and of course with the help of the church because the Church have (*sic*) their own basic communities." The Basic Christian Communities though were just one among several organizations that helped the people organize and assert themselves.

One might assume there are religious symbols that the people adopt consciously or not. For example, the exodus from the evacuation center to the peace zone site, was truly an "Exodus," in the Biblical sense, to the people who were blocked and otherwise discouraged by the military. Father Ronnie who fought for the people is considered somewhat like a "Kristo." Comparing the Cantomanyog and Bituan experiences, the Bituan people seemed less preoccupied with religious rituals than the Cantomanyog people. The Bituan residents drew on a stronger well-tested religiosity, which they did feel obligated to display.

No doubt the Catholic Church is rooted in the communities of Bituan and Cantomanyog, as revealed in their similar histories. Early missionaries depended a lot on the lay leaders to keep the Church and the faith alive because of the lack of local clergy. Tuluhan (where Bituan is) is particularly significant because many Filipino priests in North Cotabato come from here, most likely as a product of the dedicated work of Italian PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missionaries) missionaries. Indeed the soil was "prepared by martyrs." Father Tullio Favalli was killed in Tuluhan by persons targetting another more outspoken priest. Candoni (where Cantomanyog is) was the mission territory of Irish Columban priests (and thus shares with

Tulunan the influence of foreign missionaries), and the Basic Christian Communities or *Gagmay nga Kristiyanong Katilingban* that the Columbans established are thriving in around 25 barangay chapels (or *kapilyas*).

After the peace zone had been declared in Bituan, whenever the military generated negative propaganda against the peace zone, people would come down to Kidapawan and respond over the radio. Whenever there is any provocation by the military (such as at the guard outpost and military barricade near the entrance of the peace zone), the people react immediately. They have access to the radio station owned by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate so they can report any harassment, and the military desists to avoid a negative image. This kind of vigilance puts the military on the defensive. "Every time there is harassment, *mag-e-air out ang mga tao so mag-apologize na rin ang mga militar*," one respondent mentioned.

From the time the peace zone was created the Inter-Barangay Council was development oriented. The peace zone was not meant simply to be an area devoid of military conflict but also a place where people could create an ideal community.

When the people had decided to leave the evacuation center (after the Church intervened in a food blockade by the military), there was an exodus to a hilly area owned by an absentee landowner. The civilians petitioned the military for all of Bituan to be declared a peace zone. The whole area is about 4,000 hectares and used to be a settlement before the houses and school were burned down in the period 1987 to 1989. The military and NPA blamed each other for the destruction.

The military tried to block the creation of a peace zone, saying that the situation was abnormal. The people answered that it is precisely because the situation is abnormal that a peace zone was needed. Under normal conditions they would not have to demarcate a peace zone. The people succeeded in establishing the Bituan peace zone including houses, the settlement area and farm lands, that spans two kilometers in diameter.

A dialogue was held between the military and civilians after an armed encounter between the military and the NPA at the entrance to the peace zone. "*Kung may problema* they can ask the military to dialogue with them," an observer said. It seems the people have reached the point where they are

not afraid to die, and consequently have the courage to confront those who endanger their lives. In this regard, the support of the provincial governor was important. Also the Peace Commission requires that the peace zone be recognized by the Governor in order that the Peace Commission can communicate with the peace zone.

The military cannot intervene in the internal affairs of the four neighboring peace zones because of their strong support mechanisms. The people do not relent because they have nowhere else to go. The declaration states that they will remain in the peace zone even at the risk of being killed. The people put up a police unit to exercise their own police powers in the zone. They insist that civilians should be left to solve their own problems.

The important issues of concern include land use and adequate social services. These problems have long been aired by the people but the response of government authorities has been weak.

The settlers in the four peace zones in Tulunan are mostly Ilonggos and Antiqueños (as indicated by the names of the places. Alimodian and Miag-ao are towns in Iloilo province). In October 1992, an Inter-Peace Zone Coordinating Council (IPZCC) was organized to also serve as a development council. All officials of the four different peace zones met to plan a general assembly and present the concept of the IPZCC to the residents of the four peace zones in Tulunan for them to ratify. A consolidated peace zone increases security in the area and strengthens internal organization to further validate the peace zone. The Coordinating Council then has greater leverage when it negotiates with government bodies. The IPZCC also undertakes sustainable development programs. "*Sino ba naman and magkakaroon ng project kung palaging may giyera?*," a resident complained.

The benefits peace zones have realized can be grouped in two categories: (1) Economic Improvement -- "*At least medyo makaka-angat sila sa kanilang situwasyon,*" observes an NGO advocate. For example, there are consumer and marketing cooperatives in the different zones; and (2) Political Empowerment -- "*Nagkaroon ng realization na, after all, nasa mga kamay nila ang mga solusyon. Parang ganoon na nakikita namin na tumatayang sila (kung) na-i-imagine nila ang dialogue with the military,*" according to an observer. The local government also acknowledges them as a people. In fact, they are even recognized as a potent political force during elections and courted for

their votes.

“From their experience *talagang nakirapan sila at nakita nila na dapat mag-organize at humingi ng tulong*. The peace zone can be described as a meta-legal process, it is now within the legal process but still within the bounds of constitutional provisions that people have the right to organize,” mentions a human rights lawyer who closely follows the developments.

Comparing the Cantomanyog and Bituan Peace Zones

There are many significant similarities among the settlers in the Tulunan and Cantomanyog peace zones. To begin with, both are rural migrants, from Iloilo and Antique, occupying unowned or unclaimed land which either they cleared themselves or settled previously. Both share a similar religious devotion and have been caught in armed conflict.

There are of course differences. Cantomanyog is just one sitio of about fifty families, while Bituan alone has 130 families and there are the three other settlements. The consolidated Inter-Peace Zone area from Bituan to Tuburan takes half a day to cover by foot. In addition, the leaders of both zones have had different training and political experience. The Bituan leaders are more “seasoned” in the sense that they have undergone more seminars and workshops, were more adept and sophisticated in their political comments and observations and revealed in their language a familiarity with ideological jargon used in social analysis. The people of Bituan and other Tulunan peace zones organized themselves, perhaps with some assistance from support groups or allies. Still they have their own assessment and can function independently. For example, the Bituan peace zone leaders could also tell NGOs whether they are acceptable in the area or not. Some NGOs were told not to enter because the people felt that the communities would only be “used” to obtain funding.

As a general observation on the Tulunan peace zones, the people empowered themselves under conditions of extreme tension and asserted their right to life, not only against the military and the NPA, but also against anyone who might take advantage of them. Since their situation is still fragile, the Tulunan peace zones need the assistance of sincere allies.

A meeting was sponsored between representatives of the Bituan peace zone and Cantomanyog. Four people from the Cotabato zone visited Cantomanyog and engaged in dialogue. The Cantomanyog people envy the Bituan people because of the support and recognition they receive from the Provincial Governor and the Congressman; while the Bituan people envy the Cantomanyog people for the kind of NGO support they receive from individuals identified with the *Pag-hili-usa sa Paghi-daet* and the Bulig Foundation.

It is in the rural peace zones, Cantomanyog in Candoni, Negros Occidental and the four peace zones in Tuluhan, North Cotabato, where the people have truly changed. For one, because these peace zones were established during times of extreme need and stress, the people mustered great resolve and courage in order to declare the peace zones. The establishment of the peace zones was a matter of basic survival, much more than for either the residents of Naga or Sagada. In establishing these peace zones, the sense of solidarity and community in each of these villages reached a new level.

The rural peace zones represent extreme models of people's organizations, which cover whole sitios or barangays through various training programs, formation seminars and workshops, especially in the Basic Christian Communities. The communities attempt to incorporate in daily life new norms dealing with sharing and collective decision-making and rational conflict resolution. Among the basic ecclesiastical communities, the elements of faith introduces a poignancy that binds their efforts.

The extreme nature of these efforts derives from their commitment to their land and communities, for which they are literally willing to die. Both the people of Cantomanyog and Bituan were evacuees in the protracted conflict between the military and the NPA. At a certain point they refused to be evacuees anymore and they decided to return to their land and stay there, no matter what. The rural peace zones involve the poorest of the poor, protecting and dying for their own land because it is their last stronghold.

Such is the situation where the dispossessed have taken the initiative, with the assistance of non-dominating allies, to map out their own development programs, essentially out of distrust of government authorities. The communities have grown so confident and self-reliant that they sometimes deem it unnecessary to secure official government approval to undertake cer-

tain activities. Even with government help, the communities' participation improves the outcome.

What follows is the establishment of political zones which may formally still belong to the "State" but in practice are governed by the initiatives of the people. This offers a model for other people's organizations, but only if such organizations are associated with social change. They must realize their own sense of power and control over their own destiny. As a consequence, social and political institutions on the national level must serve the community's interest and not vice-versa.

There must be a change in social perspective, as exemplified in Cantomanyog and Tulunan, for peace zones to succeed. The sense of community must be strong enough for individuals to realize that their very survival depends on the amount of trust and confidence they have in one another. To the extent that they are willing to become open with one another and discuss frankly how to make personal decisions, their social bonds can withstand various threats to the security of the communitarian values they have retained from their previous associations. It will thus be an ongoing struggle to liberate themselves. For example, in Cantomanyog an issue arose concerning one leader's appropriation of a bamboo patch. The leader felt this was due him because of his position but the rest of the community protested.

Peace zones aspire to become cooperative enterprises. Indeed they can survive and flourish only if the concerned individuals feel they can entrust their lives and be completely open to each other. Peace zones are evolving into a different sort of community altogether.

A different dynamic accompanied the peace zones, a citizen-initiated political assertion based on courage and collective resolve. It inspires both awe and apprehension in the neighboring communities that can closely observe this new dynamic so that they may learn from its successes and failures.

There are unique characteristics of the peace zones which make replication in other places unlikely. For one, there is considerable armed violence coming from both the Left and Right. The community caught between these armed forces must have a different "ideology" or set of beliefs such that they decide collectively to reject the resolution of conflict through the weapons

of war. More specifically, relations among community members depend on a higher degree of trust and clear understanding of a different set of values, those which are truly communitarian and cooperative.

This does not mean however that some aspects of the peace zones cannot be replicated and take root in other communities. Even without the extreme threats to their welfare, citizens can learn to take control and empower themselves.

While the peace zones may have evolved into a different sort of community, somewhat, the political and economic conditions in the larger arena remain more or less the same. The peace zones do have to contend with the propagation of "ideologies" (ways of thinking and political traditions). Hence a certain degree of political craftiness and innovation is needed, to avoid cooptation by the larger political arena. A high degree of political strength is needed to distinguish the agendas of political allies and protagonists and assert the integrity and autonomy of the community.

To reinforce and perpetuate the example set by these communities they should exchange experiences and insights to develop a grassroots network for a citizen-initiated and maintained peace agenda. National peace movements and other local organizations can be allies as long as they respect the dynamic of the peace zones.

Policy Implications

The two main protagonists in the ongoing armed conflict in the Philippines, the New People's Army and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, have grown weary of the struggle and seek an honorable end to it. Twenty years of combat, various debacles and countless victims and martyrs, have sufficiently proven that neither side can totally defeat the other. While of course the AFP has numerical and logistical superiority, the NPA has nevertheless been able to survive and somehow thrive. But it seems too that the NPA has lost steam, and while remnant groups exist, the NPA may have as much influence in terms of geographical presence, as it had in the years immediately prior to the EDSA revolution.

It is the civilians who constitute the main casualties in this war so the demilitarized zones, peace zones and zones of life must be understood as assertions by the civilians that they refuse to be mere pawns in this violent conflict. They want to stake out territories or 'spaces' where they will not be made buffers nor targets by either armed group.

This assertion has of course been met with suspicion by both the NPA and AFP, insofar as the official national policy of each is concerned. The AFP feels that as the official protector of the State it should not be inhibited from entering any area within the sovereignty of the Republic. When the military is told not to enter an area with their weapons it implies they are not accepted nor recognized as protectors of the people. Any community which does not welcome and voluntarily support the military becomes suspect and is treated with a certain amount of animosity. Yet, in actual situations, soldiers have been known to abuse the very civilians they are sworn to protect.

In contrast, the NPA sometimes considers the "peace zone" concept as a clever form of Low Intensity Conflict military strategy, denying it access to communities which could serve as natural hideouts or sources of logistics. The NPA also considers itself as the protector of the people (whether the people accept it or not) and obliges the rural communities to support and sustain the underground liberation movement.

At the local level outside of the dictates of official military organizational policies, there are variations and exceptions which are taken advantage of by the local communities. In all the peace zones there seems to be a tolerance and even limited recognition by the local NPA, and to some extent by the local military. This acceptance comes in part from the efforts of the peace zone advocates and leaders, through their own vigilance and assertiveness. An important element may be that the soldiers, the NPA and the people have face-to-face contact, and may even know each other, hence official policies may sometimes be put aside or given less priority as more personal knowledge guides relations.

In general, however, the NPA and AFP are wary of each other and are alert to any move by the other to take advantage of the peace zone for its own purposes. For this reason, the peace zone leaders must be as clear as possible about their neutrality and independence.

The most significant aspect of the peace zone experiments is the fact that neither armed protagonist can secure the alleviation of violence so the people themselves have taken the initiative to resolve the conflict by declaring to both sides that they will not tolerate nor condone fighting within their territories. This is a reassertion of civilian supremacy in its purest form, and the basic impetus is that the people want to be left alone to lead normal lives and develop their communities towards some modicum of prosperity.

Both the NPA and the AFP recognize that military force alone cannot bring about justice and prosperity, hence the need for social development to address fundamental problems. But both these armed groups, with their predisposition toward military solutions, may not be best suited for the task of social development so various communities have undertaken this crucial responsibility, protecting themselves only defensively against any armed threats to the peace process.

Major Dave Sabido, Army spokesman in Negros Island, expressed the opinion that if the national peace initiatives sincerely push through, there would no longer be a need for peace zones because the whole country would become a peace zone. In an ideal situation of total peace, he feels it is superfluous to think of little havens of peace for which people must struggle to initiate and maintain.

Peace zones are almost revolutionary in the sense that they offer a different solution to the armed conflict dilemma, without having to rely on national "organs" for impetus or waiting for approval from the armed protagonists. The approach draws primarily on an "appeal for life" and moral suasion. The moral grounds are ultimately based on a desire to protect the land that they need for survival. After ensuring some guarantee of non-aggression from the armed groups, the communities can proceed to establish the economic conditions that will foster the kind of prosperity, for which the armed conflict is supposedly being fought. Whether or not the national peace initiatives will succeed in reaching a viable resolution of the armed conflict between the NPA and the AFP, the peace zones are going ahead with their own development agenda.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The peace zones were declared during the period from 1987 to 1990. There was a particular convergence of historical national events that established the peace zones as viable alternatives. On a national level, the issue of ending hostilities was already being considered, although actual fighting was still raging in many areas. Clearly, in many rural areas war fatigue has already set in and many civilians would take any opportunity to stop the fighting. In those cases where the civilian population is directly threatened, it is perhaps only a matter of time before the communities actively seek a cessation of hostilities.

It goes without mention that when the civilian initiative did not succeed, the NPA and AFP could be cast in a bad light if they did not respond positively to the civilian initiative. The particular stage where the NPA and AFP were at that time may also have been important considerations, although the civilian communities were not as concerned with approval from armed protagonists as they were with obtaining recognition as peace zones.

No national organization devoted to peace issues can be credited with the idea of peace zones for it was truly a grass roots initiative based on the sincere desire for demilitarization and self-determined boundaries as well as a palpable fear of weapons of war. Moreover when the peace zones were declared, communities looked first to local support before any sort of national projection was made.

In Tulunan, the help of the provincial governor and the Congressman, seemed sufficient to guarantee the survival of the zone from political and military interference of the other parties. In Sagada, the Coalition for Peace did provide support in terms of attracting media coverage and contacts, and facilitating meetings with various national government officials. The Office of the Peace Commissioner came to document the process and "speak for" the concerns of the peace zones but the main impetus came from the peace zone communities themselves. For the most part they kept their integrity and remained true to the dynamic they had started."

One major lesson learned from a study of peace zones is that, trite as it sounds, the human spirit always prevails in the face of adversity. The most

successful peace zones are those where people have stared death in the eye yet not succumbed to fear.

Comparing the four peace zones visited (Naga, Sagada, Cantomanyog and Bituan) one could hypothesize that the greater the sense of urgency and threat of violence, the more steadfast and stronger is the reaction of the community. The three rural peace zones (Sagada, Cantomanyog and Bituan) that actually experienced violence reacted with more conviction in declaring and maintaining the peace zones. In Naga City, the response of the population was less resolute perhaps because the sense of urgency and threat of violence were not as palpable.

On the other hand, there are communities which have experienced violence yet did not declare peace zones. Why did these rural communities not assert themselves? One possible answer is the degree of social or community organization that exists in the communities. In Sagada, the traditional clan councils and close social ties among the elders and prominent citizens may have facilitated the development of a consensus to confront both the NPA and AFP. The role of the *dap-ay*, or whatever remnants there are of the old and traditional social and political structures, should not be underestimated and merit further investigation. Possibly there are forms of community or civil society established before the State that encourage discussion and decision-making, or the attainment of consensus.

For Cantomanyog and Bituan, there were mechanisms for them to meet regularly to assess their situation, either through small Christian communities or other local organizations. Perhaps because they could not depend on anyone else other than the Church and other sincere local leaders, they had to find strength, solidarity and conviction in their social ties. The fact too that the residents of these two places are migrants suggests an added dimension of being able to devise previously unconsidered options. They might be motivated also by the thought that they do not have much else to lose.

Recognition of the power in organization seems to be a key ingredient in the success of a peace zone. The experience and exposure of the leaders, by way of training programs, also matter as do networks, allies and support mechanisms. But ultimately it is how the people organize themselves that determines whether the peace zone will prosper.

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APPENDIX

List of Key Informants

Naga Respondents

Atty. Soliman Santos
Mr. Cesar Belangel
Msgr. Alberto Nero
Mr. Jose Grageda
ex-Gov. Luis Villafuerte
Sr. Supt. Renato Paredes
Col. Victor Mayo
Mayor Jesse Robredo
Atty. Luis General

Cantomanyog Respondents*

Bishop Antonio Fortich
Fr. Rolando Nueva
Inday Corazon Elesio
Manay Consor Apolinario
Marianito Apolinario
Maj. David Sabido
Ma. Lourdes Montinola Tison

* The research team also had a big meeting with all the community members of Cantomanyog wherein adults and children alike shared their peace zone experiences.

About the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

The UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS) was established in September 1985 to promote interdisciplinary studies on critical topics that influence development policies and issues.

The UP-CIDS initiates and supports research involving innovative methodological approaches and multi-disciplinary collaboration. While public policy questions are the primary concern of UP-CIDS, it also encourages basic research that is needed for informed formulation of policy.

The UP-CIDS functions under the Office of the UP President. The UP-CIDS has four major programs, the UP State of the Nation Assessment Program; the Peace, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights Program; the Educational Research Program; and Special Programs. For further information, contact: The Executive Director, UP-CIDS, UP Diliman, Quezon City. Tel. Nos. 97-35-40, 99-96-91 (fax) and 98-24-71/79 local 5518.

UP-CIDS Peace, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights Program

The Program on Peace, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights is the U.P. Center for Integrative and Development Studies's contribution to the University's efforts to help the country grapple with its critical problems regarding peace.

The Program has been able to support several studies by faculty members dealing with peace, conflict resolution and human rights concerns. Most studies have notably dealt with the impact of armed conflict on Philippine communities, and the various initiatives to build peace and find peaceful solutions to the major armed conflicts besetting the country.

The Program has also sponsored several consultations, a regional training on domestic conflict resolution, workshops and public fora. These were aimed at building knowledge and generating interest on peace and human rights issues, enhancing human resources capability in peace and conflict studies, and developing strategies for creating the national environment for a lasting peace.

Another component of the Program is the set of researches on psycho-social trauma. This sub-program is specifically concerned with generating a database and studies on the psycho-social impact of armed conflict.

The Program is envisioned to further facilitate and broaden the participation of the University in the task of national and global peace-building.