

“We are targeting women because they can actually influence decision-making”

Interview with Professor Jurma Aming Tikmasan on women’s participation in peace processes

What role do women play in the peace process at the national level in the Philippines?

Women play a vital role at the national level. Actually, in the latest peace process, there are five women at the negotiating table. The chairperson is also a woman, and one of the leaders sitting in front is another woman. In addition, the legal aspects are being dealt with by women, often aged 35 years or younger. They are all attorneys.

Why is it important to have women involved in the national peace process?

It is most important to have women involved because they can verbalise the particular needs of women. The women at the negotiating table are able to enshrine the protection of women’s rights in the law, ensuring that

“They can verbalise the particular needs of women.”

women are properly represented and are able to meaningfully participate in political processes. However, despite the prominent representation of women at the national level, it is challenging to bring the national results to the communities.

How do you include local women in peace processes?

As I mentioned, this is a major challenge now. There are not so many local women who are leaders in politics themselves. In addition, it is difficult to connect with and inform other groups of women who are living in hard-to-reach communities. These women have almost zero knowledge about what is going on at the national level, yet they will be asked to vote in support of laws. But how can they possibly make a wise decision if they

are not being informed well enough about the consequences of their vote? So the few female leaders try to organise consultations and guidance to provide all women with the necessary knowledge to make an informed decision. Unfortunately, we do not always have enough time and resources to inform as many women as we would wish. Why target women? Because women are the ones who encourage debate in the home and can actually influence the decisions made by the members of their family. But the geographical location of our communities hinders our efforts to reach them all.

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What role should external actors play to bring women’s issues forward?

External actors to a limited extent have actually been providing technical and financial support. Even if we said we could do it ourselves, the reality is that we cannot do it alone. The scale of the problem to be solved is overwhelming, which is why we do need external support. In terms of mobilisation and in terms of multiplying the number of people who can actually work with us, we still have a long way to go and this is where we need assistance. We also need to establish a connection with our stakeholders and consolidate the gains we make on women’s issues. These relationships can only be sustained if we don’t let it go. One meeting is not enough. We need to be repeating the message over and over again. We won’t stop until everyone is repeating it and everyone understands the importance of women’s involvement in political processes.

“The scale of the problem to be solved is overwhelming, which is why we do need external support.”

Professor Jurma Aming Tikmasan

Professor Jurma Aming Tikmasan is a Board Member of Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro (Women working for justice in the Bangsamoro) and Dean at the College of Fisheries at Mindanao State University in Tawi-Tawi. She has been working with other non-government organisations, mostly based in Muslim Mindanao, to strengthen women's participation in decision-making. A champion of women's empowerment, she served as Gender and Culture Adviser for the southern Philippines at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Her way of promoting peace is based on disseminating relevant information to all concerned. This approach includes addressing cultural/traditional practices that are discriminatory to women. To do this, she works closely with the Ulama (Muslim religious leaders) and academia.



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Phone +49 (0)228 959 25-0 | Fax -99
sef@sef-bonn.org | @sefbonn
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