

Panday Kalinaw

Building Peace in Mindanao

By Paul Glynn, Columban Priest



Muslims and Christians share a laugh at a recent peace-building workshop in Mindanao

Panday Kalinaw is comprised of a group of Muslim and Christian volunteers who are committed to bringing about a lasting peace and a spirit of reconciliation and mutual acceptance between Muslims and Christians and *Lumads* (Indigenous Peoples) in Mindanao, Philippines. We conduct peace-building workshops in conflict areas throughout the island of Mindanao. We engage in peace advocacy on public radio and through the facilitation of various peace-related symposia and public debates. All this we do in conjunction with the Muslim, Christian and *Lumad* religious and traditional leaders with whom we collaborate closely.

[Our name, *Panday Kalinaw*, means 'Building peace' in *Binisaya*, one of the main languages of Mindanao.]

Interethnic and Interreligious Conflict

Inter-ethnic and inter-religious biases, animosities, mutual mistrust, and a cycle of violence and warfare continue to this day in Mindanao between what has become the majority Christian population and what have become the minority Muslim and Lumad (Indigenous Peoples) populations. This conflict goes way back to the Spanish colonization of these islands more than 400 years ago, when a particularly vehement hostility towards all things Islamic was inculcated by the Spanish authorities among the newly converted Catholics of the colonial Philippines. A massive resettlement of Christians to Mindanao, beginning during the American colonial period, has seen the Muslims and the Lumads (indigenous Peoples) both becoming minorities in their own ancestral lands and giving rise to the serious inter-ethnic tensions, misunderstanding and warfare that we witness here today.

Building Peace

Our response to this conflict is that we train peace advocates and mediators from within communities that are particularly vulnerable to this inter-ethnic and interreligious misunderstanding and conflict, empowering them to build and sustain a culture of non-violence. We work with local government officials, teachers, catechists, imams, priests, tribal chiefs and civil society leaders, to help ensure that they teach the next generation to be peace-builders in their local communities.

Our peace-building work-shops are highly interactive and great fun, using, as we do, games, drama, art, and so on, that enable the participants to explore issues around gender, injustice, discrimination, human rights and leadership in very fresh and creative ways. These workshops train community leaders to be more acutely in tune with the effects of abuse of power, injustice, human rights violations, gender inequality and discrimination in their local communities and to advocate for reform and change. In the context of Mindanao, where the unbridled destruction of the natural environment is largely due to the abuse of power and discrimination against cultural minorities, our advocacy for peace and justice by nature includes advocacy for environmental preservation.

In our own small way we hope that our efforts contribute towards building a peaceful future for Muslims, Christians and *Lumads* alike in Mindanao.



Having fun while sharing insights on conflict transformation gained.