

INTERVENTION

PHILIPPINES

6th Forum on Minority Issues
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Agenda Item No. 5: Promotion of Constructive Interfaith Dialogue, Consultation and Exchange

The Philippines is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation-state.

Philippine laws, especially the Philippine Constitution, recognize the rights of indigenous cultural communities, and allow the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship as a matter of State principle.

Executive policy instruments are also anchored on respect for human rights and religious freedoms. This is reflected in the comprehensive peace policy, the Philippine Development Plan, and Executive Order nos. 626 and 714, which the now National Council for Interfaith Initiatives, that facilitates the development, implementation and monitoring of the National Action Plan on Interfaith Cooperation.

This National Action Plan on Interfaith Cooperation, crafted in partnership with civil society groups in 2006, is a consolidation of the resolutions and commitments agreed in various interfaith conferences, in order to identify key strategies or action points for promoting interfaith dialogue.

The Philippines has also assisted in the formation of a significant interfaith mechanism called the Bishops-Ulama Conference, which is composed of 22 Catholic Bishops, 18 Protestant Bishops and Pastors and 24 Muslim Ulamas. The Government has been a partner of this group in the conduct of interfaith activities since 1996 and has also maintained close linkages with other faith and inter-faith based organizations.

The Philippines has also hosted regional and international interfaith initiatives:

- 2003: The Philippines hosted the first Asian Bishops-Ulama Conference.
- 2004: The Philippines tabled an unprecedented UN GA resolution for the adoption of interreligious dialogue for peace, which was unanimously adopted and inspired the convening of the UN Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace in 2005.
- 2005: The Philippines chaired the first Informal Meeting of World Leaders on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace in New York.

- 2006: The Philippines launched the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, which was historic in bringing together 54 governments, 15 agencies of the UN system and 110 religious NGO's.
- 2007: On the occasion of the UN GA's High Level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace in New York, the Philippines proposed, among others, the institutionalization of interfaith initiatives among UN Member-States and the establishment of interfaith centers in schools of higher learning.
- 2010: The Philippines successfully hosted the Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development in Manila, attended by 124 country delegations, as well as hosted the International Workshop of Civil Society and Faith Based Organizations on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development.
- Recently, the Philippines was host to the annual World Interfaith Harmony Week in support of UN GA Resolution 65/5 adopted on 23 November 2010.
- Presently, the Philippines is one of the convenors of an ongoing series of Asia-Pacific interfaith dialogues and also co-sponsors the annual Asia-Europe Meeting Interfaith Forum, which started in 2005.

Indeed, the Philippines acknowledges and values the importance of interfaith and intercultural understanding among peoples, and has taken more than a lip service in this acknowledgment.

The Philippine Government also recognizes the value of convergence with civil society initiatives, as well as interfaith dialogues at the grassroots level. The Philippines continues to pursue its interfaith advocacy in various multilateral and bilateral fora, as it is of the view that intercultural and interfaith dialogue can be an avenue for dismantling the culture of violence.

It is our national experience that promoting respect for cultural and religious diversity facilitate the promotion of a culture of trust, improve relations and openness among religious leaders, and enhance cultural sensitivities in policy formulation and program implementation. It can, in fact, provide an enabling environment for relative peace to flourish in conflict-affected communities and help provide a platform for conflict-resolution, healing, and reconciliation.

Thank you very much.