

World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) 2015

United Nations Interfaith Harmony Partners-Zamboanga (UNI-HP-Z)

Theme: ***“Celebrating Interfaith Harmony: A Journey towards World Peace”***

Introduction:

**Harmony for Peace**

The Silsilah Dialogue Movement in Zamboanga City celebrated the 4th World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) from February 1-7, 2015.

Amidst the lingering painful effects of the Zamboanga siege by the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) on September 9, 2013 where thousands lost their homes, jobs and loved ones and who continue to suffer today; the January 23, 2015 explosion in Guiwan, Zamboanga City where many hurts, few died and caused big distractions; and the recent massacre in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25, 2015, this time by the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front), of the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) police commandos out on orders to go after two international terrorists, this beleaguered city struggles with courage to stand on its feet above the treachery and violence drawing strength on the firm belief that goodwill, dialogue, solidarity and above all, harmony, with people of other cultures and faiths are the pathways to hope for peace.

Narrative Report:

By virtue of the Republic Act No. 10525: *“An act declaring the first week of February of every year as 'World Interfaith Harmony Week' in the entire country and mandating its observance by the different Government Agencies.”,* signed by President Benigno “NoyNoy” S. Aquino III. And the Executive Order No. BC 95-2015*: “An act enjoining all schools, government entities, private institutions, NGO’s, parishes, church-based organization, civil society groups, urban poor communities and other people’s organization to join and support the activities for the World Interfaith Harmony Week on February 1-7, 2015.”* The United Nations Interfaith Harmony Partners-Zamboanga (UNI-HP-Z) once again, for the fourth time, celebrated the World Interfaith Harmony Week with the aim to spread the message of ***Love of God, Love of One’s Neighbor and the Love of the Common Good***. The Official Partners of WIHW 2015 are the following in alphabetical order:

1. Ateneo De Zamboanga University (ADZU) – Ateneo Peace Institute
2. Department of Education (DepEd) – Region IX
3. Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) – Region IX
4. Federacion del maga Barangay Kagawad de Zamboanga (FEBARKAZA)
5. Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce
6. Golden Crescent Consortium of Peace Builders and Affiliates, Incorporated (GCCPBA)
7. Inter-Faith Council of Leaders (IFCL) – Zamboanga
8. Interreligious Dialogue Commission of the Archdiocese of Zamboanga
9. Lima Elementary School
10. National Commission on Indigenous People – Zamboanga City Office (NCIP-ZCO)
11. National Commission on Muslim Filipino – Region IX (NCMF-R-IX)
12. National Ulama Conference of the Philippines (NUCP)
13. Office of the City Mayor – City’s Interfaith Council
14. Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry
15. Philippine Commission on Human Rights – Region IX (PCHR-9)
16. Philippine Council for Sama and Bajau (PCSB)
17. Philippine National Police – Police Regional Office – Region 9 (PNP-PRO-9)
18. Philippine Red Cross – Zamboanga City Chapter (PRC-ZCC)
19. Silsilah Dialogue Movement (SDM)
20. Tricycle Operators and Drivers Association (TODA)
21. Western Mindanao State University-Peace and Human Security Institute (WMSU-PHSI)
22. Zamboanga Chamber of Commerce Industry Foundation, Inc.
23. Zamboanga Press Club, Inc.

The Silsilah Dialogue Movement acted as the leading group, at the same time the Secretariat of the Celebration. The Zamboanga siege last September 9, 2013 has created in us fear and distrust. The situation inspired us more to spread the Spirit of Love and rebuilding the Trust when we celebrated the World Interfaith Harmony Week 2014. The experience of working together brought us to win the First Prize in the celebration of WIHW 2014. H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan sponsored the annual WIHW International Prize where Fr. Sebastiano D’Ambra, PIME the convenor of UNI-HP-Z and Prof. Alih S. Aiyub, the General Secretariat, went to Amman, Jordan to receive the prize. Indeed, efforts to spread goodwill among people bring results that ultimately make people feel that the spirit of love is alive and well. This is a feeling that we all need especially in these times when the events of the world will tend to convince us of the opposite. The success of the celebration in Zamboanga City was not only heartwarming but also a motivation for the groups involved to continue to work together in carrying out future celebrations. We continue to move in the spirit of the ***“Love of God and Love of neighbor…Love of Good and Love of one’s neighbor”***. That is why this year’s celebration was a sign of hope for the Philippines, especially for us in Zamboanga City. We are grateful for the opportunity given to us to join once again the International Prize sponsored by H.M. King Abdullah.

This year the UNI-HP-Z conducted a series of activities for the entire week of February 1-7, 2015 with the theme, ***“Celebrating Interfaith Harmony: A Journey towards World Peace”.***The different activities aimed to enjoin the different people in different walks of life to experience and rediscover the essence of *Love of God, Love of One’s Neighbor and the Love of the Common Good*. The UNI-HP-Z prepared the following activities:

January 31, 2015 (Saturday) – **Hanging of the Tarpaulins**

* We started the Weeklong Celebration of WIHW 2015 with the Hanging of the Tarpaulins as a declaration to support, with the aim to announce or inform the people and let them be aware of the celebration. This activity was made possible, because of the permit issued by the City Mayor’s Office thru Mr. Antonio G. Orendain, the City Administrator.

February 1, 2015 (Sunday) – **Opening Ceremony: Gathering of Leaders in Zamboanga City with Bishop Pablo Virgilio S. David, D.D.**

* This signaled the start of the special week. It was attended by more than two hundred (200) leaders, heads of offices and civil society groups. The program aimed to reaffirm the attendee’s commitment for Harmony, Solidarity and Peace, and to continue in rebuilding a Better Zamboanga on moral and spiritual values. We are very privileged having with us Bishop Pablo Virgilio S. David, D.D. where he inspired the audiences with his 45-minute presentation on the theme of WIHW 2015; his vision about the attainment of peace particularly “Interfaith Harmony”; the meaning of “Harmony” and its counterpart “Cacophony” which produces nothing but chaos and destruction to humanity; the three (3) distinguished values that are important to attain Peace and Harmony which are Faith, Hope and Love that we can find them expressed in all religions. To summarize his presentation he quoted ***“Peace is a Journey, but it is a Journey less traveled by”*** and ended it with Marilou Diaz-Abaya’s saying: ***“I believe in happy endings, if it is not yet happy, then it is not yet the end.”*** And then followed by a testimonial sharing about Peace through Interfaith Harmony. One of the sharers was Police Sr. Supt. Angelito A. Casimiro, City Director of Philippine National Police-Police Regional Office-9 (PNP-PRO-9) made his speech even though he had to leave immediately due to the arrival of the fallen SAF soldiers who perished in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. He shared that the police are always ready to work for peace with all to strengthen communities. An excellent and heart-felt oratorical presentation, the voice of the youth for peace was performed by Ms. Jhazzle Vee P. Unsay, a 3rd year student of AB Political Science from Western Mindanao State University. Fr. Sebastiano D’Ambra, PIME the convener of UNI-HP-Z of WIHW presented the **“Harmony in Action” Initiative**. Then a video Documentary followed. This was about two (2) stories of Interfaith Harmony in Action, where the main actresses were Ms. Aminda E. Saño, EDC the President of Silsilah Dialogue Movement and Hja. Sarah L. Handang the Principal of Lima Elementary School located at Baluno, Zamboanga City. And then the two Ladies were called on stage to give their short messages.

Afterwards Ms. Saño launched the “Harmony in Action” Initiative and signed the Statement of Commitment together with Hja. Sarah and other respected leaders in the city. The closing remarks was given by Hja. Sarah L. Handang where she expressed her gratitude and appreciation to all who came and expressed their commitment and their interest to work for dialogue and peace.

February 2, 2015 (Monday) – **Tree Planting Activity and Orientation Seminar on Mothers in Dialogue: From Trauma Healing to Harmony; Culture of Dialogue, A Path to Peace**

* We started with a Tree Planting Activity on Mothers in Dialogue Orientation Seminar. This was a symbolic event to encourage Mothers of the importance of trees, water and the natural resources around us. The Tree planting activity also symbolized the caring and rearing mothers to their children. This aimed to perform the Holistic Care for a child’s health and proper nutrition; Internalized Basic Psychological principles in dealing with adolescent child; identify Best Filipino values in enhancing spirituality of life in dialogue; reflect peace education as an avenue to attain culture of peace; and share experiences of Muslims and Christians in dialogue. The participants were almost one hundred (100) mothers coming from selected Barangays in Zamboanga City. Realizing the need for “Interfaith Harmony” guided by the Love of God and the Love of neighbor, the UNI-HP-Z initiated this activity for the families, particularly the mothers, to guide their child/children in his/her psychosocial stages of development in a holistic approach and to identify her role as a good Christian or Muslim while dealing with others in order to build a harmonious family and society as well.

February 2-7, 2015 (Monday-Saturday) – **Integrate Message of WIHW in many Mosques/Masjids and Muslim Students Association (MSA)/Message of WIHW in Muslim Communities**

* Peace and Harmony are some of the elements to attain reconciliation among Muslims, Christians and people of other living faiths. Bringing together various Muslim and Christian organizations, groups, and societies are indispensable. This World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration is a strategic key to eradicate wrong notions and radical views and opinions, and eventually exterminate fanaticisms, radicalism and violence around the globe. This event aims to transmit awareness about the significance of Muslim and Christian dialogues; to build friendship and harmonious relationship among people of different faiths and religions, and to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people; and encourage all Muslim communities to spread the message of Interfaith Harmony and goodwill in the Mosques/Masjids and Madrasah, based on ***Love of God, Love of One’s Neighbor and the Love of the Common Good.*** Thanks to our Madrasah Guru Ustadh. Garson A. Hamja who reached out to many Mosques/Masjids and Madrasah Schools to make this event possible and an inspiring one.

February 3, 2015 (Tuesday) – **A Special Gathering of Barangay Officials/Leaders**

* The United Nations Interfaith Harmony Partners Zamboanga (UNI-HP-Z) with the support of twelve (12) Barangays conducted a one (1) day Forum on Community Leaders as Harmony and Peace Building Stakeholders. It strengthened the Barangay government institutional processes on restorative justice being undertaken by Lupong Tagapamayapa which mediates and conciliates disputes at the barangay level. The Harmony Zone Initiative was also presented. More than one hundred (100) Barangay Officials/Leaders were present during that day.

February 3, 2015 (Tuesday) – **Formation Education for Zamboanga City Jail Male Inmates**

* The formation was participated by almost seventy (70) detainees, the regular attendees of the Tuesday and Friday groups. This formation aimed to make the participants aware of the celebration and internalize the essence of the initiative.

The facilitator presented to the group the history and background of WIHW Celebration, emphasizing on the ***Love of God and Love of One’s Neighbor***, Dialogical Approach and the 3S (Sincerity, Sensitivity and Solidarity). Those were the ideas that can give hope, love and courage for the detainees of Zamboanga City Jail.

February 3, 2015 (Tuesday) – **A Day of Service of the Youth**

* This activity was facilitated by the SilPeace Youth of Silsilah together with the Silsilah Staff and some Women. The facilitators were given orientation by the Administrator and Chief Supervisor of Ward 9 of the Zamboanga City Medical Center (ZCMC) on how to act and what to do around patients in the said area. The beneficiaries were the Ward 8 (Pediatric) and Ward 9 (Psychiatric). They were given simple food. In this way we can promote care and solidarity to the patients being admitted in the hospital. And had a beautiful interaction among the facilitators and the patients. The Ward 8 patients were happy and thankful to have received such generous offer especially from the mothers or care providers. We were guided properly as we rendered food to the patients at Ward 9 where it contained the mentally challenged patients. We only had the opportunity to meet some manageable patients. We also met some patients who were brought to Harmony Village (The Home of Silsilah) for shelter during the Zamboanga Siege in September, 2013. There were also reports that around 4 to 5 patients were successfully discharged after being brought to Harmony Village during the siege. It was a great relief to know that the ambiance of the village had given them new enlightenment in their lives. After the visit before departing the hospital, Dr. Hermino Casto, Jr., Department head of the said ward gave us some inspirational message and expressed his gratitude towards this generous acts of visiting the wards in the hospital.

February 4, 2015 (Wednesday) – **Blood Letting Activity**

* We always believe and support in this advocacy: ***“Every Blood Donation is a Gift of Life”.*** Through the collaboration of the Peace and Human Security Institute, University Student Council, College of Nursing and other departments of the Western Mindanao State University and the partnership with the Philippine Red Cross-Zamboanga City Chapter and its volunteers, seventy-three (73) successful donors were facilitated that day.

February 5, 2015 (Thursday) – **Forum with Tricycle Operators and Drivers Association**

**(TODA)**

* A second gathering was conducted for the drivers of this Public Utility Vehicles (PUV), who mingle with different types of people every day. This activity aims to inform the drivers the essence of Interfaith Harmony. Almost one hundred (100) tricycle drivers and operators attended the activity. All of them are officers and members of an association of the PUV or tricycles. After the information dissemination the attendees were given stickers to be posted on their vehicles and to share it with others. The stickers were in Chavacano, Tagalog and English languages:
* “El Zamboanga para de aton todo, Ama kita con este!”
* “Ang Zamboanga ay para sa ating lahat, Mahalin natin ito!”
* “Zamboanga is for all of us, let us Love it!”

February 6, 2015 (Friday) – **Inauguration of the SilCare Center in Mampang Transitory Site**

* Since September 9, 2013 the Silsilah Dialogue Movement (SDM) has been on the move in many ways in solidarity with the people of Zamboanga City who have been affected by the siege. Silsilah has answered different issues and concerns to “rebuild Better Zamboanga” giving priority to the “rebuilding” of friendship, trust and solidarity between Muslims and Christians. Guided by the principle: “Dream (Think) Globally, Act Locally” Silsilah starts the **SilCare Center** which stands for *“Silsilah Care”*,

as a new effort to be with the people in the big transitory site of Mampang, serve the people as a ***“link” (Silsilah)*** between different cultural groups *“caring”* for the people, giving priority to community leaders and women, with proper coordination, evaluation and planning with agencies and groups which are present in the Mampang Transitory Site. A thanksgiving event was participated in by partners and leaders who were instrumental in the success of the weeklong celebration. There were some testimonial sharing and inspirational messages from the partners who told wonderful and inspiring stories about Interfaith Harmony.

February 7, 2015 (Saturday) – **Harmony Youth Day (HYD)**

* This activity aimed to create a venue for the young people of diverse cultures and religions to come together to inspire, experience and establish good relationship and to strengthen the common word between Muslims and Christians and people of other living faiths, *“The Love of God and Love of One’s Neighbor”* a ground of understanding for all, engaging the youth in creating a more peaceful world. At the same time this is also a gathering of student leaders coming from different schools, colleges and universities. They played a vital role in instilling positive change in the institutions and this event equipped them to be active in peace building efforts and become more aware of the new ways and means to reach their fellow students in spreading positive and inspiring views on Interfaith Harmony and Peace.

February 7, 2015 (Saturday) – **Moral Ascendancy Program with PNP-PRO-9**

* The Silsilah Dialogue Movement in the person of Fr. Sebastiano D’Ambra, PIME was invited to talk and share the spirit of the celebration to the more than forty (40) Police officers coming from the different Stations (Barangays). Fr. Seb shared to the group the importance of celebrating the World Interfaith Harmony Week, emphasizing on *the Love of God, Love of One’s Neighbor and the Love of the Common Good*. A perfect time to remind them to love more due to the incidence which happened in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. The Police is one of the Partners of the celebration, in solidarity with them and the pain for the dead of SAF (Special Action Force) 44 personnel in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25, 2015. Fr. Seb extended his appreciation for their commitment and dedication to their service. He also hoped and prayed that all people in uniforms who serve the country will not get discourage and to continue in the best of their ability to work for peace with the hope that any good achievement acquired for peace in Mindanao will continue. We also hope that this sad experience will be a lesson for all to work for the common good and not to put anymore in danger the lives of people, and that no more incidents will happen again in Mindanao and the Philippines to serve the calculated ambition of those who are in power, in all sectors, especially those involved in the on-going peace process in Mindanao. May the future peace in Mindanao be the fruit of a positive experience of people of different cultures and religions living together in harmony, in the spirit of the World Interfaith Harmony Week 2015.

February 7, 2015 (Saturday) – **Formation Education for Zamboanga City Jail**

**Female Inmates**

* The speaker/facilitator made a brief history of the WIHW and why it needs to be celebrated. Afterwards the inmates were given an activity called “Tree of Hope”. The mechanism of the activity involved their feelings of being in there and what were their strengths that kept them holding on until the end. Most of the answers were common to all of them and that was the chance of “freedom”. For the duration of staying there, majority were able to reflect on what they had done and hoped that one day as they leave the vicinity and be with their families they can have the chance to correct their mistakes in time.