



Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy World Interfaith Harmony Week 2015

THE MARYAM MOVEMENT

Background:

The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao or the Bangsamoro region is the most conflict affected, poorest, and least served region in the Philippines, with its provinces consistently rated at the bottom 10 in terms of human development. The region has been ravaged by war and conflict for several decades, and has adversely impacted the residents, and worse, created a negative image of Muslims and Islam among the Christian majority.

The Philippine government for the last couple of years has exerted efforts to address the Mindanao problem. It has initiated the much needed dialogues, called for a cessation of armed hostilities, and commenced peace talks with the representatives of various rebel groups from Muslim Mindanao. The hope was that initiatives will be started which would address the needs of the people in that region with the ultimate goal of ending armed conflict and seeking equitable resolution for the injustices inflicted upon the Muslims as a people.

The signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) is a critical step towards the establishment of the legal framework supporting the peace processes in Mindanao. The agreement sets the foundation for the long-awaited genuine, inclusive and meaningful political autonomy for the Bangsamoro, with its diversity of peoples and cultures. After 17 years of the peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation front (MILF), sustainable peace appears to be within reach, and with it, the transformation of the Bangsamoro (formerly Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao) and Mindanao aspirations to reality. However, the key is in the enactment of the enabling Basic Law by the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) that would set the parameters for its interpretation and eventual implementation by the still to be established Bangsamoro Political Entity. The draft bill is currently the subject of ongoing public consultations in both Houses of Congress.

The peace process between the MILF and the government has gained considerable attention. Yet, notwithstanding the strong support by the government in the peace process and drafting of the BBL, there is still a compelling need to continuously promote and monitor the implementation of the CAB, the deliberations on the Bangsamoro Basic Law and the development planning for the region. The continued involvement and support of the constituent communities and national body politic in the transition process is indispensable to sustainable and lasting settlement of conflict in Mindanao.

Over the transition period, there is an apparent need to support and strengthen institutions and processes crucial to the implementation of the peace agreement. There is an equally urgent need to strengthen confidence and widen the support for the peace process, not only within the core communities, but from the entire Philippine body politic. With the expected intense debates on the CAB and the draft BBL, it becomes imperative to bolster support for the implementation of the peace agreement to prevent stall or breakdown in the transition.

Recent events, both in the international and domestic arena, have created a backlash of negative sentiment over Muslims and Islam in general, and the Bangsamoro people in the Mindanao region in particular. The executions of civilians by radical groups in the Middle East, the abduction of young girls by extremists, murder of French journalists have added impetus to the increasing anti-Muslim sentiment.

On January 25, 2015, 67 people, including 44 policemen and 18 members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were killed in a police operation to capture the elusive Indonesian terrorist Marwan in Mamasapano, Maguindanao in Mindanao. The full effect of this tragic incident on the Mindanao peace process is still uncertain, although it undeniably has halted congressional deliberations on the legislative measure that would have established a new governance system and structure in the five predominantly Muslim provinces in the Philippines. While the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government peace panels vow to continue the peace negotiations, the public has been influenced by strident calls for “All Out War” that has been instigated by certain groups and individuals opposing the peace process. Media, both traditional and social, have fueled this anti-peace sentiment, riding on the wave of grief and anger over the loss of lives in the Mamasapano incident.

The immediate consequence is the deferment of congressional deliberations on the draft bill, that would have been touted as the transformative medium that sets in place the vital foundation for establishing sustainable peace and inclusive development to a much-marginalized and severely neglected Muslim region. Advocates for peace and development have seen the need to continue the deliberations on the legislative measure, lest the gains of the peace process dissipate and lose out to parochial interests of the few.

The intolerance, hatred and bigotry reflected in both traditional media and social media outlets caused by events such as Charles Hebdo terrorist attacks, the ISIS and ISIL execution of innocent civilians, and in the Philippine context, the tragedy in Mamasapano are a glaring reminder of growing anti-Islam sentiment that have gained traction worldwide.

There is urgent need to counter this wave of anti-Muslim sentiment before it entrenches permanently in the minds of people. Under this toxic environment, measures must be undertaken to dispel such negative misconceptions of Muslims and of Islam through a gentle, more collaborative and interactive manner. Dialogues, informal discourse and exchanges of viewpoints are non-threatening and non-invasive means of bridging the gaps created by ignorance and intolerance. Refocusing the attention of the public to the religious mandates of loving one's God and loving one's neighbor, would help reestablish trust and confidence in the ability and commitment to behave with civility, tolerance and kindness. Transforming the minds of the people, to make them more tolerant and understanding of their neighbors, especially in times of conflict, is key to attainment of unity and harmony. The Philippine body politic needs to be united, if genuine, sustainable and lasting peace is to be attained

Project Description

In view of the recent events, international and local, that have significantly influenced on the on-going deliberations of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) by Philippine Congress, it is timely to focus on the commonalities and unities between Christians and Muslims. Mary has become a relevant icon to both Christians and Muslims. She has been mentioned in both of the sacred scriptures of both religions, the Bible and the Qur'an. To this end, the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy (PCID) initiated the **MARYAM MOVEMENT**. The movement's name **MARYAM** is a union of two words: Mary for Christians and Maryam for Muslims. PCID has opted to launch the movement in commemoration of the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony week which runs from February 1-7, 2015.

The MARYAM MOVEMENT was conceived as an advocacy to promote MARY and MARYAM, as a common icon who serves as a bridge between followers of the Christian and Muslim faiths, and to raise awareness of the significant role of Mary/Maryam to followers of diverse faiths, thus promoting understanding among people of various cultures, religions, and backgrounds. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate that all faiths have common beliefs that unite them. In this context, the commonality is the belief in Mary/Maryam.

Additionally, the movement aims to raise awareness on the importance of Maryam/Mary to different religions and various sectors of society, not just in the spiritual context but in the historical context as well. The hope is to demonstrate that all faiths have a common belief that unites them, more particularly in Maryam, thereby promoting the goal of the World Interfaith Harmony Week, specifically:

“recognizing the imperative need for dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people, the General Assembly encourages all States to support during that week the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship, on a voluntary basis and according to their own religious traditions or convictions.”¹

Since October 2010, the celebration of The World Interfaith Harmony Week emphasizes and *“points out that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace and establishes World Interfaith Harmony Week as a way to promote harmony between all people regardless of their faith.”²*

¹ <http://www.un.org/en/events/interfaithharmonyweek/>

² Ibid.

Activities and Events

a. Lead-to Activities:

As a prelude to the formal launching of the Maryam Movement, the PCID together with the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) of Miriam College held the fourth Islam and Democracy Forum titled “Celebrating Mary: Christian and Muslim Perspectives” in the Miriam College Campus in Katipunan, Quezon City last January 9, 2015. In the said forum, people from various sectors of society came together to express their views and share their experiences relating to Mother Mary or Maryam.

Among the participants in the forum were Ms. Amina Rasul Bernardo of PCID, Prof. Macrina Morados of the Institute of Islamic Studies in the University of the Philippines Diliman, Rev. Fr. Melvin Castro of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, Dr. Kiyomars Amiri of the Embassy of the Republic of Iran, Mr. Kim Edres of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, and Ms. Guadalupe Isidro of Miriam College. Among the attendees were Atty. Rowena Guanzon of the University of the Philippines College of Law, former Senator Santanina Rasul, Philippine Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Grace Princesa, representatives from the foreign missions in the Philippines, women leaders from both the public and private sectors, members of the academe and civil society.

The forum highlighted the role of the Virgin Mary/Maryam in the Christian and Muslim religions, including scriptural discussions from the texts of the Bible and the Qur’an.


To sustain the discourse, participants and guests were requested to share their own perspectives and/or personal experiences regarding Maryam or Mary. Part of these exchanges was documented in video as part of the forum’s narrative, and the initial input for the Maryam Movement. Among those who shared their stories and were featured in a video were Sister Arnold Maria Noel from Balay Rehabilitation Center, Sulong, students of Miriam College and young professionals.

b. Soft Launch of the MARYAM MOVEMENT

Recognizing that the Philippine population is in general social media savvy³, PCID has opted to promote the Maryam Movement is through social media. As a precursor to PCID’s core activity commemorating the World Interfaith Harmony Week, PCID quietly launched the Maryam Movement Facebook Page:

← → ↻ <https://www.facebook.com/MaryamMovement/timeline>

f Maryam Movement 🔍 John Boitte Home 20+



MARYAMMOVEMENT

Maryam Movement
Community

Timeline About Photos Likes Videos

114 likes

JC Santos, Zhou Timbal and 20 others like this.

Invite your friends to like Maryam Movement

Kitty Reyes Invite

Post Photo / Video

Write something on this Page...

Maryam Movement added 113 new photos from February 17 to the album: Pagbilao Youth of Quezon Province for Maryam Movement. February 17 · 🌐 · 📷

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Maryam Movement
January 28 · Edited · 🌐

Do you have stories of inspiration and/or experience on Mary/Maryam? Please feel free to comment below and share it with us! And don't forget to use the #MaryamMovement hashtag.

Like · Comment · Share · 👍 2



Maryam Movement shared their photo.
January 28 · 🌐



The #MaryamMovement is a social media campaign in celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week 2015.

MARYAM stands for Mary (for Christians) and Maryam (for Muslims).

This is an advocacy to promote MARYAM who serves as a bridge between two faiths, Christians and Muslims.

MARYAMMOVEMENT PCID POPS THE QUESTION: WHO IS MARYAM TO YOU?

Share with us your answers and you just might be one of the winners! Just answer the question "WHO IS MARYAM TO YOU?" through a tweet, a photo, a video or a Facebook status. We will select the 10 best entries to be included in the final #MaryamMovement video. Tag, mention, message us just make sure we get to see your post!

Use the hashtags #MaryamMovement #MnM2015 #WorldInterfaithHarmony now, join the advocacy!

Visit us at www.facebook.com/MaryamMovement

POSTS TO PAGE

Maria Emma Fernandez Panizales
January 10 at 3:54am · 🌐

May we, like Mary/ Maryam build bridges that love, solidarity, peace... See More

Like Comment 👍 2 💬 1

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c. Event Commemorating the World Interfaith Harmony Week:

i. Formal Launch of the Maryam Movement and Pledging Session

On February 7, 2015 PCID, held the formal launch of the Maryam Movement, with the participation of members of the Noorus Salam and representatives of Christian faith. The Noorus Salam is a national network of Aleemat or Muslim women religious scholars and leaders, peace advocates and women organizations. PCID has been partners with the Noorus Salam, with the principal aim of mobilizing and strengthening the unity, cooperation and coordination among Muslim women sector in advancing the desired peace and development in Muslim Mindanao.

Opening the program, the Executive Director of the PCID, Atty. Salma Pir Rasul, recalled the history of the Common Word, and its objectives. Atty. Rasul pointed to a possible third area of commonality between Christians and Muslims- the respect accorded the Virgin Mary or Maryam, who is widely acknowledged as a symbol for peace, compassion, piety and love. Focusing on the Virgin Mary and Maryam, creates greater avenues for conversations and discourse, especially in the Philippines where a large number of its Christian population are devotees of the Virgin Mary. Creating awareness among the Christian population of the role of Maryam in Islam would help dispel antagonistic attitudes against the Muslim communities.

During the program, Mr. Yusuf Ledesma, PCID Convenor, provided an insightful historical context as to the etymology of the name Maryam. Mr. Ledesma, a Muslim convert, shared his personal perspectives on the impact of Mary on his life as a Catholic, and subsequently as a Muslim. He pointed to the attributes acknowledged by both Christian and Muslim faiths, indicating these commonalities could spur communications between followers of the two religions. Ms. Pilar Bautista of the Magbassa Kita Foundation, a Protestant, shared her own insight on Mary's important function as a mother and role model for women of different faiths. Ms. Bautista's father is a devout Muslim, while her mother is a Christian.

Other speakers include a representative from the Iglesia ni Kristo, a local Christian sect with a large following nationwide, and a youth representative of the Catholic faith. Both shared the impact of the Virgin Mary on their lives and their families.

Ustadja Omnuhani Mabandes of the Noorus Salam cited verses from the Holy Qur'an on Maryam. She clarified the impact of Maryam on Muslims, particularly women, stating that her virtues should be emulated. She called on members of the Noorus Salam to form the core of the Maryam Movement, and to manifest their active commitment.

The discussion was followed by the signing of the Manifesto of Support for the Maryam Movement, with the signatories pledging their commitment to promote Mary/Maryam as a conduit for fostering interfaith harmony and understanding, critical components in the advocacy for peace

The formal launch and pledging session were held at the PCID Office in the University of the Philippines Diliman Campus in Quezon City.

ii. Strategic Launching of the Maryam Movement through Social Media

To fully realize its objectives, the MARYAM MOVEMENT would seek the active participation of members of the community who believe, have faith or are devoted to Maryam and Mary. Community members are asked to contribute pictures, stories or videos of what Maryam means to them. In view of the realities of the times, PCID had decided to launch and continuously update a Maryam Movement Facebook page.

The general public has been invited to share anecdotes of Maryam's personal meaning to them and how she affected their lives. People can also likewise share what Maryam means to them as a historical or figure. The Maryam Movement encourages the participation of people of all ages, gender, faiths, and religions - in essence, from all walks of life. This underscores the goal of interfaith harmony as an advocacy.

Rules on sharing and/or posting of video or photo entries have been circulated. The recommended length of any video posting is 1 minute duration. All the video entries will be posted in the Maryam Movement Webpage through a Youtube Link. Samples of the already posted videos are shown thus:





From among the entries submitted to the Maryam Movement webpage, the ten (10) best and most appropriate for the goal of demonstrating unity and interfaith harmony would be selected, which in turn will be featured in a **FINAL OUTPUT VIDEO** to be presented to the public on December 8, 2015 – the feast day of Mary, as celebrated by the Christians.

The program will increase general awareness of Maryam and her importance to religion and faith. It is also expected to increase awareness of Maryam's role as a unifying figure for people of different faiths, cultures and backgrounds, and hopefully help lessen bigotry and misunderstanding, especially in this critical period where peace is at stake.

d. Sustaining Activities

On February 17, 2015, PCID travelled to Pagbilao, Quezon to commence the formal launching of the Maryam Youth Movement in the Quezon Province. The program was organized in partnership with the students of the Talipan National High School (TNHS) and the full support of one of Quezon Province's Board Members, Mr. Gerald Ortiz and Dr. Juanito Merle, the current school principal of TNHS.

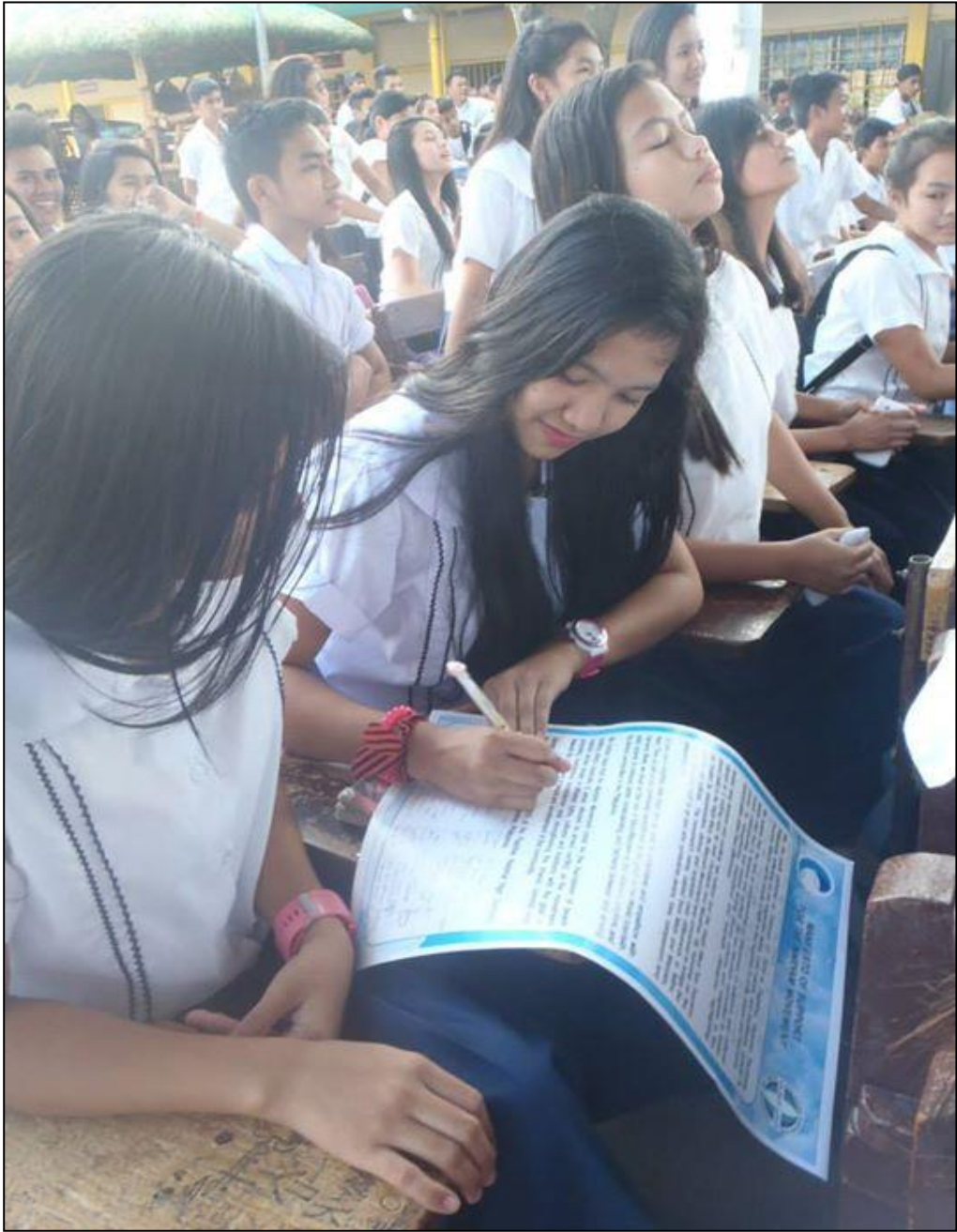
The program started with a brief backgrounder on the Common Word, and the rationale behind the Maryam Movement.

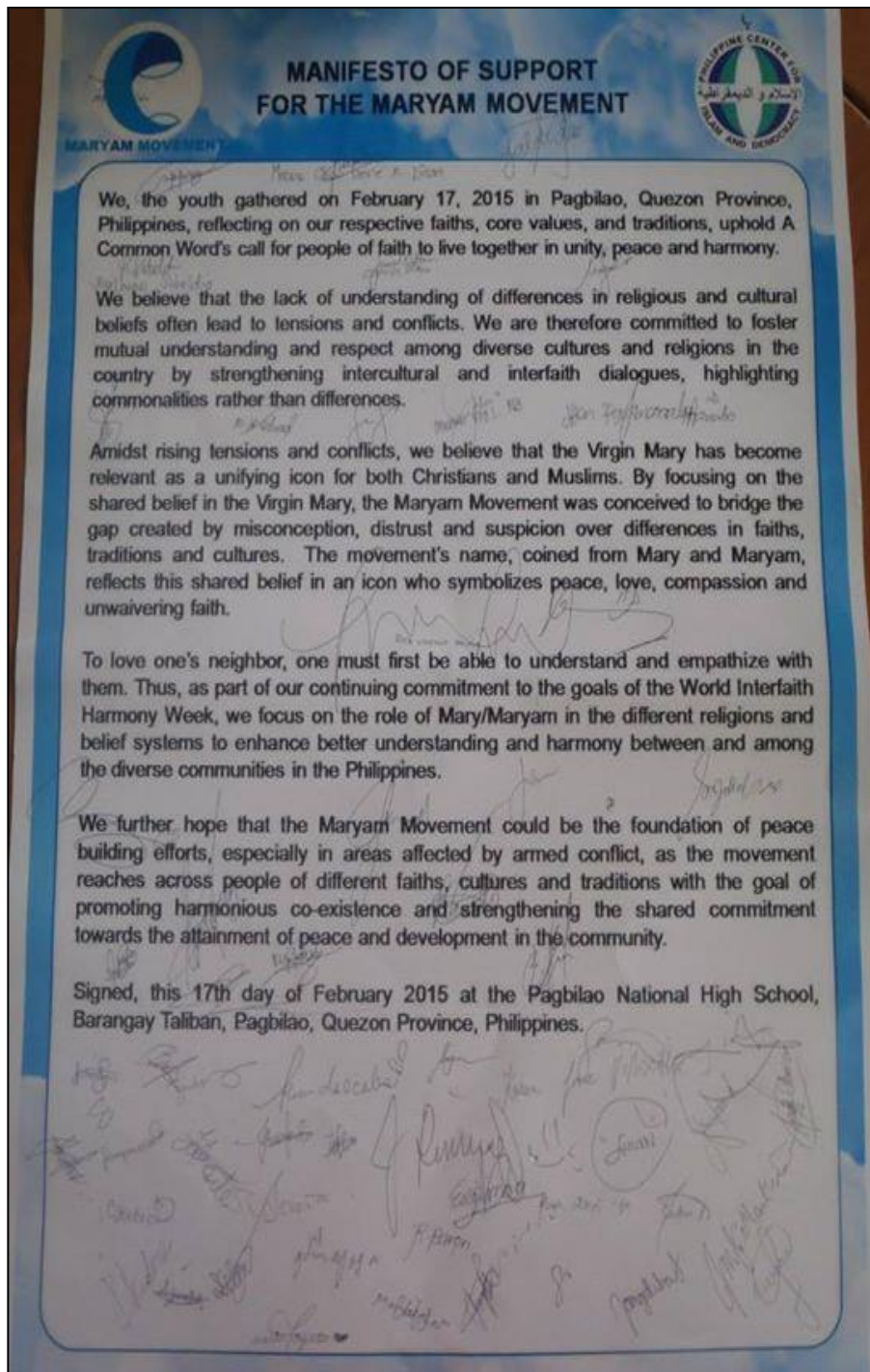
This was followed by an exchange of perspectives from representatives of the Christian and Muslim faiths. Among the speakers who talked about their ideas, perceptions, and belief about Mary or Maryam and her role in bridging the gap between Christians and Muslims, were Ms. Pilar Bautista, Project Director of Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc. and Mr. Kim Edres, National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) Executive Director for Region 4. The Lucena City Imam Samad Said discussed the verses devoted to Maryam in the Qur'an, while Provincial Board Member Ortiz shared his perspectives from the viewpoint of a Catholic.



The forum ended with the reading of the Manifesto of Support for the Maryam Movement. All the students and participants pledged their commitment through an oath of support, including the signing of the Manifesto of Support.







Future activities have been planned, including another forum on Maryam and the launching of the Maryam Movement in Manila, in nearby provinces as well as in key areas in Mindanao.

The Maryam Movement will be an interfaith activity that will continue to foster better understanding and harmony between and among followers of diverse faiths and belief systems.