

Rotary World Peace Fellow Applied Field Experience Report

News from our Rotary World Peace Fellow

Yvette Selim, a Rotary World Peace Fellow from our district who was sponsored by the Caringbah Rotary Club, is studying a Master of Conflict Resolution at the University of Bradford, in the United Kingdom.

Rotary World Peace Fellows are required to participate in study-related work activities after completion of their first academic year. The following is a short extract about Yvette's Applied Field Experience (AFE).

The Asia Foundation, Philippines

My AFE in the Philippines has been an insightful experience. From a conflict resolution perspective, the Philippines is particularly interesting. It is home to the second longest internal conflict in the world, with conflicts from community to national level that include clan feuds ('rido'), inter- and intra-community conflicts over natural resources, and intra-state conflicts by Muslim separatists and Communist rebels.

As an intern in the Conflict Management group at [The Asia Foundation](#), the highlight has been visiting Mindanao, which has the largest majority of Muslims in the Philippines. In Mindanao, I had the opportunity to meet with local stakeholders – army officials, journalists, policymakers, priests, human rights advocates and civil society leaders – and learn firsthand about the history, the challenges and progress of the peace process between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a Muslim separatist group.

"I would rather die a meaningful death than to live a meaningless life."

*Corazon Aquino
President of the
Philippines
from 1986 – 1992*

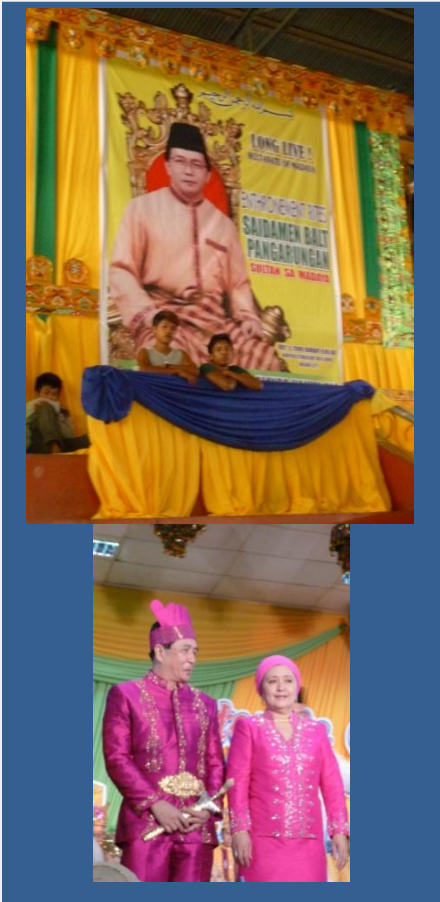
*I have always loved my poor country
shall love her until my last moment, sh
unjust to me. I shall die happy, sat*

Dr Jose Rizal

**Considered
by many to be a
national hero.**

Enthronement Rites of the Sultanate of Madaya

Also, while in Mindanao, I attended the Enthronement of the Sultan of Madaya. For over ten years the leadership of the Sultanate of Madaya was vacant due to conflict between different families in the Sarip Batua – Datu a Pitiilan clan. With support from The Asia Foundation’s local partner, the council of elders of each subclan successfully reunited the entire clan, which culminated in the enthronement on 5 July 2009 in Marawi City. A piece I wrote recording the event is expected to be published online on The Asia Foundation’s In Asia website. This traditional event was immediately preceded by a series of bombings in Mindanao which was evidence of the precarious nature of the peace process on the ground. However, military operations and rebel attacks have virtually ceased with the military’s unilateral declaration of Suspension of Military Offensives (SOMO) on 23 July 2009, followed by the MILF’s declaration of Suspension of Military Actions (SOMA) three days later.



Sultan of Madaya, Saidamen B. Pangarungan and his wife, Princess Johayra Diamond Ali Pacasum Pangarunga at the Enthronement Rites of the Sultanate of Madaya, 5 July 2009 at Marawi City.

Upcoming Presidential Elections

With the presidential elections set for May 2010, this has been an interesting time for me to be in the Philippines. In particular, I have watched the current President’s final State Of the Nation Address (SONA) and heard peoples’ responses; attended a meeting with former President Joseph Estrada (who was peacefully ousted by the Second People Power Revolution in 2001 and is seeking to be reinstated) and the Archbishop of Manila, Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales; and witnessed the crowds gathered for the funeral procession of former President Cory Aquino (considered by many to be the ‘Mother of Democracy’ in the Philippines). In 1986, the Roman Catholic Church was instrumental in winning support for former President Aquino to become the first female president of the largest Christian country in Asia and today, the Church remains a significant actor in the political foreground and background.



At the funeral procession for former President Cory Aquino, flags of her late husband, Senator Ninoy Aquino who was assassinated 26 years ago upon his return from exile, featured prominently.



Please click [here](#) for a photoslide show of the Enthronment Rites of the Sultanate of Madaya.

“Thank you for Rotary's ongoing support, without which I would not have the opportunity to be in the Philippines today.”
Yvette Selim

[Yvette Selim](#)

Sponsored by [Caringbah Rotary Club, District 9750](#)

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Rotary's presence in the Philippines

Rotary is certainly prominent throughout the Philippines and often I pass signs advertising local clubs and the 4-way test. At the Office of the Peace Advisor to the Peace Process (OPAPP), I spoke with Ms Renia Corocoto, a former Rotary World Peace Fellow from the University of California, Berkeley now Director of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Unit and Mr Pedro Cesar Ramboanga Jr, Rotarian and Undersecretary at OPAPP. In addition, I attended several meetings with – the former Senior Adviser to the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in the Philippines (2001 – 2004), key civil society leader and faculty member of the Rotary Center at Chulalongkorn University (Thailand) - Madam Irene Santiago.



Connecting with Rotarians

From left to right – Mr Pedro Cesar Ramboanga Jr (Rotarian and Undersecretary at OPAPP), Ms Meghan Houlihan (intern at The Asia Foundation) Ms Yvette Selim (Rotary World Peace Fellow Class VII and intern at The Asia Foundation), Ms Renia Corocoto (former Rotary World Peace Fellow, Director of DDR Unit at OPAPP), Mr Cris Cayon (Program Officer, Conflict Management team at The Asia Foundation).

Poverty

Living in a city, with over 11 million inhabitants and home to four of the world's largest shopping malls, it is easy to miss the stark reality of poverty in Manila and beyond. One example of local efforts to improve the quality of life for the poorest Filipino communities is the project run by The Philippine Christian Foundation (PCF). As part of PCF's education program, a converted warehouse has been set up as a school for children who live on or near the Smokey Mountain rubbish site in Manila. To accommodate the need for extra classrooms, another school made from light weight cargo boxes is being built on another rubbish site nearby. PCF's livelihood and skills training program teaches women the skills for making jewellery from magazines and can tops, which is then sold locally in Manila and online to generate funds.



Smokey Mountain rubbish site in Manila



The new school being built by The Philippine Christian Foundation