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A Dalit, or Untouchable, cleans sewage from a manhole in India. Although manual scavenging, as this practice is known, is illegal in the country, the practice persists. (Photo from <https://factly.in>)

Manual Scavenging in India: A Critical Look at the 2013 Law

Urmila Pullat

Manual scavenging—the practice of cleaning non-flushing toilets with rudimentary implements by Dalits, or Untouchables—has been legally outlawed in India. However, this custom of the caste system continues and even leads to the death of Dalits. An examination of the law prohibiting the practice indicates why. [\[Read more\]](#)

Bombs Do Not Discriminate between Muslims and Christians

Asif Aqeel

Pakistan once again felt the pain of another violent tragedy when suicide bombers killed at least 72 people and injured hundreds more on March 27 in a park in Lahore. While the group claiming responsibility for the attack, Jamaatul Ahrar, a splinter group of the Taliban, said that Christians celebrating



Easter was the target, the majority of victims were Muslims. One Muslim victim observed: “Bombs cannot see religion. They hit everyone.” [\[Read more\]](#)

Safe Haven for Rapists in Uniform

Asian Human Rights Commission

When police are the perpetrators of rape, is there any hope for justice? This repeated reality for women is an indictment of Pakistan today. [\[Read more\]](#)



Peace Continues to Be Taken Hostage in Burma

Burma Partnership

There is now much optimism inside and outside of Burma for the future of the country as the first freely and fairly elected government in more than 50 years assumed office at the end of March. However, the actions of the outgoing government in the waning days of its administration pose challenges for the new administration led by the National League for Democracy (NLD), especially in its efforts to achieve a lasting peace with the nation's ethnic minorities. [\[Read more\]](#)



Sharing about Justpeace in Mindanao

Rachel Bergen

As a Muslim woman living in the southern Philippines, A-esha Afdal Ampatuan has witnessed the devastation of war since a child. Because of this experience, she attained a university degree in political science and attended the School of Peace (SOP) held by Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) in Cambodia. Motivated by her personal familiarity with war, she wants to use the knowledge and skills she's acquired to build a different world than the one she faced as a child. [\[Read more\]](#)





One of India's thousands of manual scavengers cleans sewage from a manhole even though the practice is illegal. (Photo from www.youthconnect.in)

Manual Scavenging in India: A Critical Look at the 2013 Law

Urmila Pullat

On April 3, 2016, four men died of asphyxiation in a clogged manhole in Dodballapur near Bangalore. Two of these men were manual scavengers while the other two who died were passing by and tried to save them.

Manual scavenging is the scourge of India, mired in complex issues of caste, poverty, class and orthodoxy. Reports of manual scavengers dying in manholes and drains are common, and it is heart-wrenching to know that this illegal, abhorrent and inhumane practice still continues unabated in India. Most of the time it takes place with the full

knowledge and sanction of the State. In the most recent case, the workers were employed by a private contractor who was given a contract by the local municipality.

No credible data regarding the number of manual scavengers in the country is available. According to the census of India in 2011, there are still an estimated 182,505 households engaged in manual scavenging and about 7.94 *lakhs* of cases of human scavenging in the country (one *lakh* equals 100,000). Many organizations working for the liberation and rehabilitation of manual scavengers allege that this number is not accurate and that there are far more people forced to work as manual scavengers. Meanwhile, the data of the Houselisting and Housing Census of 2011 released by the registrar general of India in March 2012 reveals that there are still around 26 *lakhs* of insanitary latrines in the country. It is thus obvious that this issue remains a tremendous problem in India, but its true extent can only be understood by commissioning large-scale surveys.

The recent death of four people near Bangalore provoked strong reactions from activists, who called it an “institutional murder,” with no arrests made and no specific officials named in the case. No convictions were made under the earlier 1993 law; and although the 2013 law, the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, has been touted to be a vast improvement on the old law, providing specifically for rehabilitation, it remains to be seen whether any convictions will take place under it either, especially in this recent case.

A Weak Law, Toothless and Ineffectively Drafted

The 2013 law, in reality, is not a vast improvement on the 1993 law. This more recent law prohibits employment of manual scavengers and the construction of insanitary latrines under Section 5, which further mandates that every insanitary latrine in existence at the date of the commencement of the law shall be demolished or converted into a sanitary latrine. However, upon closer examination of the definition of an “insanitary latrine,” we see a very telling exception, for Section 2(1)(e) reads:

“‘[I]nsanitary latrine’ means a latrine which requires human excreta to be cleaned or otherwise handled manually, either in situ, or in an open drain or pit into which the excreta is discharged or flushed out, before the excreta fully decomposes in such manner as may be prescribed:

“Provided that a water flush latrine in a railway passenger coach, when cleaned by an employee with the help of such devices and using such protective gear, as the Central Government may notify in this behalf, shall not be deemed to be an insanitary latrine.”

Here we see that Indian Railways has been given an easy excuse to bypass the law with no requirement to stop the employment of manual scavengers with the use of “protective gear.” This is a generous loophole, one that shows a lack of seriousness on the part of the State to commit to banning this abhorrent, casteist practice. An easy escape route for Indian Railways, this provision will enable the complacent leviathan to further postpone modernizing the age-old sanitation system and utilize advancements in technology to clean up their act.

According to Section 7 of the 2013 law:

“‘[H]azardous cleaning’ of a sewer or septic tank by any person is banned:

“No person, local authority or any agency shall, from such date as the State Government may notify, which shall not be later than one year from the date of commencement of this Act, engage or employ, either directly or indirectly, any person for hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank.”

However, hazardous cleaning is defined thus under Section 2(1)(d):

“(d) ‘[H]azardous cleaning’ by an employee, in relation to a sewer or septic tank, means its manual cleaning by such employee without the employer fulfilling his obligations to provide protective gear and other cleaning devices and ensuring

observance of safety precautions, as may be prescribed or provided in any other law, for the time being in force or rules made thereunder;”

This is an inherent flaw in the law which prohibits employment of manual scavengers, but yet sees the need to further prohibit employment of manual scavengers for “hazardous cleaning.” Does this mean that the prohibition is not absolute and that it is permissible to use manual scavengers with protective gear? The Indian Railways are allowed to do so, and it would seem that by not unequivocally prohibiting manual scavenging in **any form** that the battle has been lost even before the fight has begun.

Furthermore, Chapter IV of the 2013 law provides for the identification of manual scavengers and their rehabilitation through a survey conducted by the municipality. The significant drawback here is that the survey needs to be conducted only if a municipality ***“has reason to believe that some persons are engaged or employed in manual scavenging within its jurisdiction.”***

A 2014 report on manual scavenging, published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), entitled *Cleaning Human Waste: ‘Manual Scavenging,’ Caste and Discrimination in India*, states:

“Descent-based practices are so deeply internalized that even state institutions, such as village councils and municipal corporations, perpetuate these practices. Many from the manual scavenging caste communities are denied any other jobs, leaving them dependent on manual scavenging for subsistence. Where the government itself employs manual scavengers, there is no hope for effective implementation of the 2013 Act and other laws aimed at ending manual scavenging.”

To be eligible for rehabilitation, one must be included on a government list of manual scavengers, but the decision to conduct surveys is left to the local authorities, who are more often than not, as pointed out by HRW and as apparent in the recent case in Bangalore, the employers of manual scavengers themselves, either directly or indirectly.

In a country where the caste system is deep rooted and profoundly “internalized,” this stipulation is a major weakness of the law. When implementation of the law is itself problematic, a weak section such as this one makes it easier for the local authorities to evade the requirements of the law by claiming that no manual scavenging exists within their jurisdiction.

Finally, the largest obstacle remains the police. In order to effectively eradicate manual scavenging, culprits need to be charged for employing manual scavengers, and upper caste people, who routinely deny the scavengers their basic entitlements and make it impossible for them to leave this abhorrent practice, need to be arrested.

Furthermore, manual scavengers need to have access to loans, land, housing and all other mandates under the law. Effective policing is necessary for all of these provisions to be ensured. Manual scavengers, however, are obstructed by all parts of the system, leaving rights violations to continue, encouraged and supported by a defunct criminal justice system.

The implementation of a law depends both on the strength of the letter of the law and on the implementing authorities. When both are toothless and lacking in seriousness, where is the hope for any real, lasting change?

Urmila Pullat is a lawyer from India who has recently completed her master's degree in public policy from the University of Oxford. She is working on the India desk of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in Hong Kong on a six-month project on rule of law and criminal justice institutional reform issues and is also conducting research on the Hong Kong justice and anti-corruption system.



A suicide bombing on March 27—Easter—in a park in Lahore created chaos in the city, killing more than 72 people and injuring hundreds of others. A splinter group of the Taliban in Pakistan declared that their target was Christians, but most of the dead were Muslims. *(Photo from <http://news.myquest.in>)*

Bombs do not Discriminate Between Muslims and Christians

Asif Aqeel

Tahira Gill is fighting for her life in Jinnah Hospital's intensive care unit. The 55-year-old widow was a nurse in the General Hospital before she was injured in the Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park bombing on March 27. She called her friend Ester Saleem, 50, and her family to go on an outing with her after the church service. They were at the park when a suicide bomb killed more than 72 people and injured hundreds of others.

"We were 11 people in all," said Ester, who is being treated for a fractured arm at the General Hospital. "We had arrived at the park only 10 minutes before the blast. It was so

crowded that we decided to go back, but a deluge of people was pouring in, and going back became almost impossible.”

It was the deadliest terrorist attack in the history of Punjab Province and the deadliest in Pakistan since the 2014 massacre of 134 schoolchildren at a military-run school in Peshawar. Most Pakistani Christians live in Punjab, and their highest concentration is in Lahore.

“The explosion was so powerful that it threw my brother Sharoon and I and some of our friends at least five feet away from where we were standing,” said Irfan Patras, who is being treated in the General Hospital for a fractured leg. Irfan, 17, is a student at Ghauri Wisdom High School in the mostly Christian locality of Lahore called Youhannabad.

“Within no time, police vans and ambulances arrived at the scene and began taking the injured to Jinnah Hospital, but no one was paying attention to Sharoon, who was badly hurt,” Irfan continues. “I attended to him for a while and then dragged myself to a rickshaw, carrying him with a broken leg. I put Sharoon inside the vehicle and also saw an old injured woman who had been burnt and a child. We rushed to Jinnah Hospital.”

Irfan and his friends had been up all night on the eve of Easter and went to the sunrise service at 4:00 a.m. Then they slept until the afternoon.

“My friends Irfan, Adnan and Wasif called me in the evening to join them on a trip to Fortress Stadium,” Irfan adds. “When Sharoon heard that, he insisted on going with us.”

They left for Fortress Stadium, but their rickshaw driver told them he didn’t know where it was and asked if he could take them to Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park instead. They agreed.

Sharoon succumbed to his injuries and died that evening. He was buried the next day. When I spoke to Irfan, he was unaware of the death of his brother. His family did not want him to go through the trauma so soon. They couldn’t keep the secret from him for too long though.

A splinter group of the Taliban, which calls itself Jamaatul Ahrar, claimed responsibility for the attack. They said they had targeted Christians celebrating Easter, but only 23 of those who died were Christians. The rest of the dead were Muslims.

Across from Irfan's bed in the General Hospital, three members of a Muslim family had also been hospitalized. They had come from Sahiwal to celebrate their holidays after their children's exams. They had not particularly paid attention to the fact that it was Easter Sunday. They rented an entire bus for the 35 members of their extended family and set out for the popular recreation destination in Lahore.

"Moments after we entered the park there was an explosion," Sidra Aslam, 26, who teaches at a school in Sahiwal, said. "It took us awhile to be able to get inside because it was crowded. I was about 50 feet from the site of the explosion. There was blood and smoke everywhere. That is all I can remember."

Three of her relatives were killed in the bombing, and 24 were injured. She had noticed that four of the patients in the small ward were Christians.

"But I do not believe only Christians suffer because of terrorism," she said. "It is a threat to the entire country, and not just to certain people or communities."

"Christians took part in the Pakistan movement and are giving our blood to save Pakistan," said Napoleon Qayyum, a Christian leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

"Unlike the Youhannabad incident in March last year, we see that this incident has brought the two communities closer."

The first major attack on Christians in this wave of terrorism happened right after the 9/11 attacks. On Oct. 28, 2001, four gunmen entered St. Dominic's Catholic Church in Bahawalpur during the Sunday service and fired indiscriminately, killing 15 worshippers and a police guard.

The following year on March 17, 2002, five people were killed when terrorists targeted the Islamabad International Protestant Church. Later that year six Christians died in an attack on the Christian Missionary School in Murree on Aug. 5. Four days later four Christian worshippers were killed in an attack on the Taxila Mission Hospital Chapel on a Sunday. On Sept. 25 the same year, seven Christian aid workers of Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf (Institute for Peace and Justice), a Christian charity in Karachi, were massacred in their office. Before the year ended, three women were killed, and 15 people were injured in an attack on the United Presbyterian Church near Sialkot on Dec. 25 as they were celebrating Christmas.

Communal attacks on the Christian community continued throughout the decade. Major incidents where Christian communities were targeted by their Muslim neighbors over accusations of blasphemy include Sangla Hill in 2005, Gojra in 2009, Islamabad in 2012 following the Rimsha Masih case and Lahore's Joseph Colony in 2013 when protestors attacked and burned Christians' houses. A Christian couple was burned alive by an angry mob in November 2014, and a similar violent act in July 2015 in Sheikhpura was thwarted.

Suicide bombings, like the attack in Lahore's Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park bombing in March this year, are, of course, one preferred method by terrorists to inflict violence. A year ago, for instance, on March 15, 2015, suicide bombers attacked two churches in Youhannabad—again in Lahore—killing at least 14 worshippers. The death toll would have been much higher if church volunteers on security duty had not acted quickly. Earlier, in 2013, a suicide bomber blew himself up outside the All Saints' Memorial Church in Peshawar where at least 78 worshippers were killed.

Punjab parliamentarian Mary Gill says the terrorists targeted the park in the most recent incident because security around churches had been heightened. "This was probably the first time a park was targeted," she said.

For the Anglican bishop of Multan, Leo Roderick Paul, it is a matter of concern that guarding the churches can no longer keep the Christian community safe. "Our people are not safe anywhere," he says.

Mary Gill believes this is a sign that terrorism ultimately threatens people of all faiths. This realization, she hopes, will bring various communities closer together.

"Bombs cannot see religion," says Sidra Aslam. "They hit everyone."

Like all Pakistanis, she has seen the various faces of terrorism. She has seen terrorists attacking places of worship, markets, bus stops, shrines and security installations. They have targeted minority faiths as well as various sects of the Muslim majority. They have targeted police, security agencies, soldiers, men, women and children. They have exploited security weaknesses as well as social and economic fault lines.

The 2011 Pew Research Center report entitled Rising Restrictions on Religion characterizes Pakistan as the third least tolerant country to religious diversity. Another of their reports, Common Concerns about Islamic Extremism: Muslim-Western Tensions Persist, says that only 16 percent of Muslims in Pakistan hold a positive opinion of Christians.

Asif Aqeel is a journalist and human rights activist and conducts research on the issues of religious minorities. He can be reached at <asifaqeel@gmail.com>.



Women in Pakistan protest for better enforcement of laws to protect women from violence and for the media in the country to provide better coverage of this issue. The police in Pakistan, however, frequently do not protect women but instead are responsible for raping them. (Photo from www.asafeworldforwomen.org)

Safe Haven for Rapists in Uniform

Asian Human Rights Commission

Pakistani women, be they young or old, or even dead or alive, suffer rape by perverted elements that use rape as a tool to suppress and oppress half of the country's population. One cannot fathom the moral bankruptcy of a society where a rape occurs every two hours. Going by the statistics, each day 12 women suffer rape in the "Land of the Pure"—the meaning of the country's name in Urdu and Persian. It is not simply a matter of blaming a proportion of perverts in society when state functionaries are themselves indulging in rape with abandon.

That rape is endemic in a country where Islam is the ideology seems oxymoronic. And the way it is addressed is only making matters worse. Pakistani society, by and large, treats incidents of rape as a hush-hush affair to be swept under the carpet. The response to atrocities is to banish them from one's consciousness. Thus, many women are forced to suffer in silence. It beats common sense that you can get raped but can't speak about in a

conservative society like Pakistan. No woman dares to approach a police station to report this crime for fear of further shaming and potential abuse by the police officials themselves.

Rape is the most common form of custodial torture against accused women. Law enforcement officials also force the accused to confess to a crime by raping his female relative in front of him, i.e., rape is used as a means of torture. Many women are also raped as a result of a vendetta against their male relatives. Some women are simply kidnapped by law enforcement officials from their homes or the streets and raped. Despite the reality, torture and the ill-treatment of women in custody has received scant attention from legislators and adjudicators alike. No specific law exists to penalize such heinous crimes.

Recently, on April 6, 2016, the station house officer, or SHO, of Digri police station in Sindh Province's Badin District picked up a 20-year-old mentally challenged woman from her home. Later, on the victim's complaint of rape, a first information report (FIR) was registered against Digri SHO Mohammad Aslam Jamali under Section 376 of the Pakistan Penal Code. Jamali was suspended and later arrested. However, with the help of his colleague, he managed to escape from police custody in Mirpurkhas District of the same province.

Proving rape is in itself a difficult task. However, when the law enforcement agencies are involved in such crimes, it becomes next to impossible for the victim to seek and attain justice. Even in most of the cases that have garnered media attention, the matter has been hushed-up after the initial uproar and media frenzy.

The cases of Dr. Shazia Khalid in 2005 and Uzma Ayub in 2011, who was 16 when she was raped, highlight the extremely insecure environment in which women of Pakistan are compelled to live, one where the custodians of the law turn predators and commit sexual violence. Both the victims were raped by military personnel and were later forced to flee

the country. In an interview, Dr. Shazia said, "I did not get justice, and I will regret that for the rest of my life."

When asked to comment on Dr. Shazia's case by a reporter of the Washington Post, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the then-president of Pakistan, unabashedly stated that claiming rape has become a "moneymaking concern" in Pakistan and that many Pakistanis felt it was an easy way to make money and get a Canadian visa.

Loot and rape has become an everyday affair for the citizens of the country. On Sept. 3, 2015, six policemen in Lahore raped a 22-year-old for three days while keeping her intoxicated. The victim later told the police that Constable Shahzad Warraich, along with his five accomplices, kidnapped her at gunpoint. She said that the accused took her to a hotel and continually raped her after administering intoxicants. She alleged that the accused had also snatched gold ornaments worth 150,000 rupees (US\$1,417) from her.

Heartbroken and dismayed, many victims resort to self-immolation as a means to protest and escape the injustice. On Oct. 22, 2015, a 20-year-old woman from Multan in Punjab Province set herself on fire when the police refused to register a case of rape against three police officers. On her deathbed, she testified that three policemen raped her. The officers were arrested after the woman's death began receiving local news attention.

The delay in registration of the case not only gives impunity to the perpetrator, but it also allows time for the evidence to vanish, thus making it impossible to prove rape. Delays in judicial proceedings are another hurdle faced by victims. The conviction rate of rapists is zero in Pakistan, making the country a safe haven for rapists. Many cases of rape are settled outside of court in which the perpetrator is allowed to go free or gets away by paying a small amount of money in the name of compensation to the aggrieved family of the victim.

In [Uzma Ayub's](#) case, the perpetrator of rape, a military man, told Uzma that they would pay her whatever compensation she required. She refused any offer of settlement. The

influential elders of the area, who were acting as arbitrators between Uzma and the alleged rapist, were forced by the police to pressurize the victim for a settlement. Upon her refusal to accept compensation, she was threatened and harassed.

Under administrative jurisprudence, an act of a state functionary amounts to the act of the State itself, and the State is responsible to protect and compensate its citizen if he or she is victimized by such actions. However, there is no semblance of the rule of law in Pakistan, and thus, the State feels no duty towards its citizens. The status quo in the garb of democracy is perpetuating and unleashing terror upon citizens by giving unbridled impunity to the guardians of the law. This state-sanctioned violence against women and sex discrimination by law enforcement authorities is a denial of the fundamental right of access to justice to women.

The persistence of violence against women in Pakistan highlights the failure of the judicial system, which is affected by a strong feudal system, religious and social taboos, traditions, customs, a homogeneous religious society, a vast gender gap, a monstrous policing system and sexual discrimination in economic and social activities.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is a regional non-governmental organization monitoring and lobbying human rights issues in Asia. The Hong Kong-based group was founded in 1984. More information is available on AHRC's web site at <http://www.humanrights.asia>.



Incorporating all ethnic groups that have taken up arms against the government for decades, such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), above, in a genuine nationwide cease-fire agreement is one of the daunting tasks awaiting the new government. (Photo from <http://pulitzercenter.org>)

Peace Continues to Be Taken Hostage in Burma

Burma Partnership

In one of the final moves just before the formal [transfer](#) of power to the new administration in Burma, former president Thein Sein [dissolved](#) the government-affiliated Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) and [transferred](#) its assets and properties to new organizations that will be led by leading figures and top officials of the MPC. The MPC was established in 2012 as part of an agreement with the Norway-led Peace Donor Support Group that also comprised the European Union, Japan and U.N. agencies. The MPC was a beneficiary of massive investments from peace donors in the international community and became a prominent symbol of the former military-led Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government's "successful" peace process efforts. The former head of the MPC and chief negotiator in the previous administration,

Aung Min, will [lead](#) the Center for Peace and Development—one of the new institutions—and will be joined by Tin Maung Thann, special adviser to the MPC.

Burma commentators and political analysts have decried the farce surrounding the MPC with some even demanding that the organization should be audited and investigated for [corruption](#) and the lack of effectiveness over its term. A longtime Burma watcher and the director of Educational Initiatives, Igor Blažević, [commented](#) on this transfer, stating, “This deserves a proper investigation by [the European Anti-Fraud Office]. If EU funds have been misused and misappropriated, [then] the EU investigating office has a right to undertake an investigation.”

Evidently, there are sharp disjunctures in rhetoric, policy and daily realities despite the “success stories” peddled by the former government of Thein Sein. Since the nationwide ceasefire agreement was signed in October 2015, the fighting has increased both in Kachin and northern Shan States. For example, on the same day that a new civilian president was sworn in on April 1, 2016, fresh [fighting](#) flared up in northern Shan State. Meanwhile, a heavily [security-centered](#) approach continues, particularly in restive areas, like Rakhine State, despite the lifting of the state of emergency. Similarly, arbitrary arrests and detention are rampant under the Unlawful Association Act of 1908, which has been notoriously abused to designate the members and activities of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), and anyone deemed to be affiliated with EAOs, as illegal. Allegations of [torturing](#) suspects and those accused of being sympathizers of the Arakan Army (AA) have also increased after renewed clashes with the Burma army, which has vowed to “eliminate” the group.

The new National League for Democracy (NLD) government has inherited many issues created by the outgoing government, and resolving armed conflict in ethnic areas remains at the top of their agenda. In his [opening](#) address at the [inauguration](#) ceremony, President U Htin Kyaw stressed the importance of peace, the [prioritization](#) of national reconciliation, achieving a truly democratic Constitution and a genuine federal union.

Another notable step forward was the creation of a new cabinet portfolio—the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs—by the NLD-led government. However, the move was met with lukewarm [reactions](#) with some observers doubting if the body can decisively play a role in the ongoing peace process, including reform of the political environment for ethnic communities to address their aspirations. There are already early visible tensions emerging from the lack of consultation and invitation of ethnic political parties in the formation of governments at different levels.

During the time of the MPC's existence, internal conflict has soared exponentially while the non-inclusive “nationwide” ceasefire agreement (NCA) features only eight of the country's EAOs. Recently, the non-signatories of the NCA came together and made an [announcement](#) to defend each other from further attacks and attempts to create divisions by the Burma army. International donors of the MPC have also come under fire for legitimizing the heightening conflict and endorsing an ill-conceived peace process. In doing so, what transpires then is a box-ticking exercise where peace donors and partner organizations are satisfied with the hollow “returns” on their investment, such as the non-inclusive and flawed NCA. They, including members of the Peace Donor Support Group and other initiatives, such as the EU-coordinated Joint Peace Fund, cannot afford to remain oblivious or turn a blind eye to the fact that the NCA possibly remains a useful tool for the Burma army and its political proxies to maintain their control over the peace process while creating divisions and discrimination, including through the timeworn divide and rule tactic.

Furthermore, there are fears that the peace process has turned into a lucrative “industry” in Burma as the proliferation of peace advocacy and development initiatives, activities and projects demonstrate. Meanwhile, the delivery of aid and assistance only minimally reaches the real victims of conflict and intended beneficiaries of a durable and just peace. Recently, the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC)—formed after the NCA signing to monitor and respond to complaints in signatory areas—reported that it had

[inadequate](#) resources and expertise to respond to the complaints of violations, mostly from Shan and Karen States.

The dangers are already laid bare and do not bode well for the new political leadership, particularly in the absence of clear policy formulation and direction as regards addressing the civil war and the tyranny of abuses that accompany the conflict. In this regard, the NLD-led government and the international peace donors and aid agencies need to fundamentally reappraise the peace process, starting with an inquiry of the MPC and its workings, including the serious allegations of public misconduct, and seeking accountability for the copious investment dollars. It is imperative that the review is conducted in an inclusive manner and held in participation with those who have been systematically left out, including primary stakeholders, such as women as well as ethnic communities. The further threat here is that, by also remaining gatekeepers, the Burma army and its civilian-clad political proxies can hijack and dictate the terms, pace and extent of the peace process and ultimately what form of democracy Burma eventually takes.

Burma Partnership is a network of organizations throughout the Asia-Pacific region that advocate and work toward realizing a movement for democracy and human rights in Burma. Based in Thailand, it acts as a link between groups inside the country and solidarity organizations around the world.



A-esha Afdal Ampatuan, a 2015–2016 School of Peace (SOP) alumni

Sharing about Justpeace in Mindanao

Rachel Bergen

She grew up in a Muslim camp called Abubakar in the southern Philippines. Although a stronghold for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the camp for many years enjoyed relative peace and independence from the government. People in the community were free to practice their religion and live together, that is, until then-President Joseph Estrada declared an all-out war against the MILF. In reality, the entire Muslim community was affected by the war, including Ampatuan and her family.

In 2000, the entire Abubakar camp was evacuated. Ampatuan's father was away at that time, so her family stayed behind to wait for him. They were the last family left in the camp.

“People told us the military would drop bombs on our house if they saw smoke,” Ampatuan recalls. “When we were cooking and we heard the sounds of airplanes, we would put water over our fire in case they could see the smoke. We would cook a lot at a time, so there was no need to cook again and again.”

Though her home was never bombed, Ampatuan saw atrocities during the all-out war and to this day cannot watch a violent movie without screaming.

When her father came back, the family finally fled the camp and walked for days in the jungle. They lived in the wild for more than a month before walking to Marawi City and starting life again.

The Abubakar camp was destroyed; and to this day, no one lives there because of the military occupation. It's used by the Philippine government for storing ammunition.

Currently, the government is in the midst of peace negotiations with different rebel groups in the country, including the MILF. The Philippine government and the MILF signed a Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014 following 17 years of negotiations. The CAB calls for the abolition of the present Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to be replaced with a Bangsamoro government. It also calls for the drafting and passing of a proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) for the new Bangsamoro government to use. The proposed BBL was supposed to be approved into law in 2014. However, the legislative process has been laborious, and it was abandoned by the Philippine Congress in March 2016 with the approach of the national elections in May and the end of the term of President Benigno Aquino III.

One of the fears now is the escalation of tense emotions and frustrations among the people in Muslim-dominated areas in the southern Philippines. These tensions may result in violence, the revival of armed conflict and breed even more violent rebel groups.

Community Organizing in Mindanao

Ampatuan's childhood and the current political climate informed her decision to pursue political science at the University of Southern Mindanao and later to participate in the School of Peace (SOP) organized by Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF).

Political science seems like an obvious choice for someone who has witnessed atrocities; but after learning the mechanics of politics, Ampatuan felt it was necessary for others to know about political science too.

During her first year as a political science student, Ampatuan started working with Moro and indigenous communities as a volunteer with her sister at a non-profit organization called Moro People's Community Organization for Reform and Empowerment (MPCORE).

Ampatuan wondered if she was really contributing to change though. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science, she decided to pursue education to learn how to effectively share what she was learning at the community level.

"We go to the communities to educate, organize and mobilize Bangsamoro and indigenous people to get equal rights in government social services," she explains.

Ampatuan also helped found Youth Alliance for Peace (YAP) at her school—a club made up of 10 active members who focus on interfaith work.

Together with YAP, Ampatuan hosted peace forums in high schools in the region with the goal of working together for change.

"We need to help each other; we need to support each other in order for our province to be successful," Ampatuan says.

Although she was learning a lot in school and sharing her knowledge with other students and youth, she felt she needed to learn more to contribute to the movement for peace and justice in Mindanao.

School of Peace

Ampatuan participated in the 2015–2016 SOP in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

“I wanted to learn something new that we can use to make our movement and our vision richer,” she explains.

She learned a great deal that will contribute to her work with MPCORE, but also some important lessons about herself.

“When I first come here, I’m the kind of person that will automatically react when I’m not agreeing on someone’s idea. You can see it in my facial expression, and I always say what’s in my mind. Along the way, I realized that respecting others’ ideas is more important. After SOP, I learned how to listen first and think before I speak. Do I really need to say this—or no need?”

Over the break between the second and third module of SOP, Ampatuan led a workshop on peace and diversity at her alma mater for a group of political science students using many of the principles she learned at SOP.

She also proposed and helped lead a municipal youth summit on the theme of empowering youth for justpeace together with the YAP members. This summit brought together Christian, Muslim and indigenous young adults to talk about peace, diversity, interfaith dialogue and the role of youth and young adults in the peacebuilding process.

Ampatuan was also invited by her provincial government to share at the Young Cotabato Leadership Conference about her experience at SOP in Cambodia and what inspires her to continue leading.

Her time at SOP may be over, but Ampatuan feels she has a responsibility to share her experiences and the lessons she’s learned.

She plans to continue hosting peace forums in high schools to help young people understand justpeace principles from an early age. She also plans to continue promoting the culture, rights and religion of her people, but through a justpeace lens.

“After SOP, I really need to work to educate my people about our identity. Most youth, like me, don’t know what kind of ancestors we had, what practices, what beliefs,” she says. “I want to collect stories from my tribe, from the elders. I want to know more.”

Ampatuan plans to continue her work with YAP and MPCORE but hopes to improve the curriculum with lessons from the SOP curriculum.

Rachel Bergen is from Canada working as a Writer and Editor for Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Her one-year internship is supported by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).



Interfaith Cooperation Forum

#52C Street 123, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

#6F-23 Waterloo Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, Hong Kong