

Panel Discussion on Partnership and Co-operation Between States and Civil Societies

The next part of the concluding day of GAAMAC2 involved in a panel discussion in response to regional group ideas presented that morning. The panel discussion began with **Ms. Jamila Mohammed**, Chairperson of the Kenya National Committee on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination. The advice she presented to the plenary participants was for state and civil society to work together as it was critical to the process. They must liberate each other's strengths. She also stressed on the importance of regional committee and national committees to work together, as they do in the Great Lakes Region. She went on to add that civil society comes in different forms, and states must do their due diligence and then reach to organizations that work at the grass roots level.

Next, **Ms. Andie Lambe**, Executive Director of the International Refugee Rights Initiative spoke from her experience. She expressed how conferences such as GAAMAC were an empowering platform as they engaged multi-stakeholders in the process. However, she found that often in real life such collaborations are not as obvious or effective. She pointed out that civil societies are critical to the process as they can act as an intermediary between the state and what is happening on the ground. In addition, civil societies have experiences at various levels. Civil societies run the risk of persecution or of being ignored, regional civil societies are often disregarded as not having enough local knowledge. The only option, she explains, is to continue, as there is no acceptable alternative. She further added that civil societies are not a harmonized group – we also disagree from time to time. The important thing was to step outside of comfort zones and build new relationships.

Subsequently, **General Buenaventura Pascual** from the Philippine Armed Forces had the opportunity to address the plenary. He described how their armed forces had transitioned over the past decades into a protector of their citizens. He encapsulated three major steps that had allowed them to do so:

1. Inlusiveness
In the Philippines, senior members of the armed forces were previously sitting on boards of companies and committees adding to their power that had potential to be abused. Today, this is no longer the case. In addition, the armed forces are more focused on merit based promotions and being equal opportunity employers.
2. Transparency
In order to improve this aspect, the Philippines has created a multi-sectoral advisory board to advise their Chief of Staff. This advisory board has become an important link between the military and civilians.
3. Partnership

He elaborated on the armed forces were professionalized through education. Their personnel are taught about human rights and mass atrocity crimes and this has raised the level of humanity if their soldiers. They have a monitoring system in place to sustain their vision.

Mr. Hafid Abbas, the Commissioner of the National Commission of Human Rights, Indonesia expressed his views to the plenary. In his experience, there are five pillars that are key to engagement are:

1. Institutionalization
The government cannot work in isolation. Particularly in periods of transition such as in Indonesia, a new social cohesion needed to be formed. This was accomplished through training at all levels, including training for religious leaders, police and media.

2. Reform legislation
3. Addressing marginalized and internally displaced groups
4. Immediately harmonize with international mechanisms and nationalize them
5. Prepare monitoring systems

He also stressed the importance of sharing best practices within the nation and with other countries.

The floor was then opened for participants to add their questions and comments. Some of the key ideas that emerged included:

- When talking about engagements between state and non-state actors, we must remember that there are human groups, portions of society that are looking for representation. Often these minorities are beyond the reach of government and civil society organizations.
- In terms of improving relationships with the armed forces, there are several mechanisms available. In the case of the Philippines for example, these mechanisms permeate to the grass roots level and help build cases to prosecute perpetrators. There are several agencies engaged in continuous dialogues, conducting training seminars so that people can help and respond to victims
- The importance of National Human Rights Institutions must be highlighted. They are a key forum for discussion particularly at the regional level, and can be a space to provide human rights education programs
- A key group of politicians seemed to be absent the GAAMAC discussions. This is a group that does wield and sometimes abuses power, and it would be beneficial to have them involved in the discussions around mass atrocities
- Some advice is required on how to ease strained relationships between military forces and civilians particularly when armed forces personnel have been prosecuted for heinous crimes.
- Armed forces should also be viewed as humans and not just as guns. They have human interests as well

To conclude the session, the panel speakers were asked to leave the plenary with a final thought. Ms. Jamila Mohammed emphasized the training and sensitization of parliamentarians. She also suggested training to prevent violence is equally important at the grass roots level to deal with sensitive times such as elections.

Mr. Hafid Abbas ended the session by offering Indonesia as a testimony and to share their experiences with GAAMAC. As they are particularly large in the ASEAN region, they would have much to offer to strengthen the region. Indonesia would also be a strategic entry to dialogue with the Islamic world as they have many moderate voices in their midst. Indonesia is also looking at the potential of a non-aligned movement. They are keen to have a stable democracy and Mr. Abbas offered Indonesia as a possible host for GAAMAC3.

The session was closed with the final comments made by Ms. Andie Lambe. She expressed that we must accept that this is relationship amongst the participants at GAAMAC, like any marriage, takes work. There would be a honeymoon period and times when people may disagree. However, it would be our shared goal that would make the relationship last. The work to be done in the field of prevention is more important than any one individual or any single institution.