

Conflict Management Strategies in Indonesia:  
Learning from the Maluku Experience

Workshop report

## I. Introduction

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) together with the Indonesian Institut Titian Perdamaian (ITP), and with the assistance of the Insitut Tifa Damai Maluku, held a one-day workshop on “Conflict Management Strategies in Maluku: Learning from the Maluku Experience”, in Ambon, on 14 October 2010.

Organised with the support of the Canadian Embassy in Indonesia, the workshop brought together representatives from various local government agencies, NGOs, academics, as well as religious and traditional leaders, to discuss conflict management strategies in Maluku and the progress towards reconciliation and reconstruction achieved to date since the outbreak of the conflict in 1999. The Regional Secretary (Sekda) of Maluku province delivered an opening address, in the presence of the Second Secretary from the Canadian Embassy in Jakarta.

The workshop, the first in a series of three, will contribute to the HD Centre’s ongoing project, “Comparative Perspectives on Conflict Management in Asia”, undertaken as part of the Asia Security Initiative of the MacArthur Foundation. This research project will generate new analysis on conflict management and prevention possibilities in Indonesia, India and the Philippines. The last two workshops will be held in Central Sulawesi and West Kalimantan by March 2010.

## II. Overview of the Maluku conflict

Maluku was the centre of one of Indonesia's most vicious communal conflicts in the post-Soeharto era. With the fall of Soeharto's regime in 1998, a combination of emerging democracy, weak government institutions and the absence of charismatic leadership paved the way for dissent and secessionist demands. A heterogeneous Indonesian population and the isolating geography of the archipelagic state contributed to problems of effective governance. The conflict in Maluku, like many conflicts in Indonesia, did not erupt overnight. The outbreak of violence was attributed to grievances suppressed for many years.

As in many communal conflicts, it is necessary to examine history to understand the roots of the conflict. During the colonial period, the Netherlands treated the Christians favourably while sidelining the Muslims. Following the formation of the independent Indonesian Government in 1950, Southern Maluku led by Ambonese Christians rebelled against the central Government's attempt at incorporating them into a unitary Indonesian Republic and putting an end to the special treatment they had received under Dutch power. This subsequently led to the formation of Republic of South Maluku (RMS) by Ambonese Christians who wanted a separate state. However, the Indonesian Republicans prevailed in the clashes with the Christian separatists and for the next few decades, the loyalty of the latter to the Republic of Indonesia continues to be doubted by the nationalists.

During the Soeharto era, in the 1980s and the 1990s, a large number of Muslims were relocated to Maluku from other parts of the country, displacing Christians and altering the religious balance. The arrival of the migrants also meant that more employment was taken up by them. The migrants moved into commercial sectors especially transportation, while the Ambonese Christians were progressively pushed out from their traditional employment in the civil service, schools and police.

The 1979 law n°5 on village administration compounded this trend. The law was aimed at standardizing local administration and managing the divisions and subdivisions of Indonesia, but it weakened the traditional *pela*<sup>1</sup> alliance system and the *raja* (traditional village leaders) system of government in Maluku. The *Raja* was replaced by a village government headed by a low ranking official of the Indonesian bureaucracy. Village boundaries were also reshaped, affecting the status of *adat* (traditional) land. The administrative changes that occurred under the law also provided a voice for the increasing number of migrants. However, tensions grew over issues of village borders and status of traditional land (*tanah adat*) which was subsequently freely traded. These changes impacted on the delicate ethno-religious balance of the region.

The loosening of central rule following the ouster of Soeharto in 1998 brought many of these deep-rooted fears and mistrust to the forefront. Inter-religious violence and riots broke out in Jakarta and violence erupted in Maluku. The conflict was triggered by a dispute between an Ambonese Christian bus driver and a Muslim passenger that subsequently erupted into full scale violence between the two religious communities in Ambon in January 1999.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pela* is a village alliance system unique to the Central Maluku. It binds Muslim and Christian villages together. It played a pivotal role in traditional social relationships and cultural identity. The system which has been in place for hundreds of years has kept Christian-Muslim tension between the Ambonese in a relatively stable state until the 1970s.

The Maluku conflict came to an end in 2002 following the signing of the Malino II Accord that called for truce between the Christian and the Muslim communities. The conflict lasted more than three years and resulted in an estimated 5,000 deaths and 500,000 displaced people.

### III. The workshop

Officials from the Department of Social and the Ministry of Home Affairs (Depdagri) and non-governmental actors attended the workshop.

Participants agreed that Maluku has not fully recovered from the violent conflict and is still in a peacebuilding phase. Most of them expressed the view that the Maluku conflict was not caused by religious difference but by a clash of vested interests at the elite level in Jakarta which exploited religious differences. In many instances, the religious card was used to mobilise support. Although this argument is prevalent among the local community in Maluku, it is not clear who the instigators were.

*“The conflict (in Maluku) is a state crime against the people of Maluku.” - Workshop participant*

Participants were particularly critical of the role of the military and the police whom they believed were responsible not only for inciting the conflict, but also for taking sides rather than acting as the neutral party

whose task was to disperse the violence. The relations between the police and military were also plagued with institutional rivalry, preventing effective cooperation and coordination. This is not unique to Maluku however, but rather a national problem. Security forces were also accused of being a major source of weapons and ammunitions for both sides. They were also blamed for allowing the Muslim militia from Java, Laskar Jihad, to enter Maluku and contribute to the violence.

Conflict impacts commonly reported included massive destruction of property and infrastructures; economic growth significantly slowed down and compounded by a high inflation rate, higher than most other cities in Indonesia; and displacement of at least a third of the population. Participants also cited the psychological impact of the conflict on children. For example, the latter tend to view the military and police officers in high regard. Whereas in the past they would generally have the ambition of becoming a doctor or a lawyer, they now more commonly state soldier or police officer as their future career ambition.

### A. *Key issues on conflict management*

Participants were generally critical of conflict management efforts to date and claimed that NGOs and civil society have done more for the local community than the central and local Governments. The top down approach of the Malino II Agreement was regarded as the turning point in the conflict, made possible thanks to the support of numerous community-based peacemaking initiatives.

Key criticisms included:

- There has been no proper implementation of the Malino II Agreement. This complaint is commonly cited in all reports on the Maluku conflict. While the Agreement had initially achieved broad legitimacy in the province, it later failed to ensure sustained absence of violence. Reasons for this included: the findings of the independent investigation team, tasked with investigating the causes of conflict and major violent incidences, were not published; the working groups (*pokja*) set up under the Malino Agreement to follow through with the implementation of the peace terms were not empowered by the authorities and lacked sufficient budget to function; and many locals accused the Agreement of being elitist and not having included consultations with those at the grassroots level.
- The local Government's approach to internally displaced people (IDPs) was and is more inclined towards relocation than reintegration. Although the local Government has allocated budget for reintegration, the programme has not been implemented properly. Funds disbursed for the compensation of IDPs remain a highly contested issue. Authorities have been accused of siphoning the money and lacking transparency in the disbursement of funds. Workshop participants underlined the fact that many IDPs have not received the promised compensation while others have received unexplained varying amounts. In some cases, the Government's efforts to relocate IDPs have caused more problems, as illustrated by the Pohon Mangga case (see box).

Pohon Mangga is a piece of land set aside for Muslim burial for the people of Amahusu village. As Amahusu is an *adat* village, Christian IDPs approached the Amahusu *Raja* to request the allocation of an area to which they could return. The *Raja* assigned a site near a mountainous area which the returnees deemed inaccessible. They consequently started building their houses near Pohon Mangga. Over the years, as more and more houses were built, some were located within the muslim graveyard. The volatile situation was compounded by pigs rearing in the same area. Clashes now occur almost everytime a Muslim burial takes place. According to a youth leader in the village of Amahusu, numerous requests have been submitted to the head of the district to intervene and resolve the issue, but nothing significant has been done so far.

- There has been no coordination of peacebuilding efforts among the different levels and types of government agencies and between governmental and non-governmental actors. Implementation of Presidential Instruction Scheme (Inpres) Number 6/ 2003 is an example of lack of coordination between administrations at the provincial level and in the city (Kota Ambon). Under this scheme, the central Government allocates a

significant amount of money to the provincial Government for conflict recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in Maluku and North Maluku. However, the provincial Government has implemented a conflict recovery action plan without any consultation with the districts Government. As a result, those in the districts felt that some of the actions taken did not meet the needs of the local community. There is also a lack of follow up among the various ministries. Additionally, the Maluku Governor, Karel Albert Ralahalu, has been accused of misusing the funds allocated under Inpres 6.

- The local Government is too focused on physical reconstruction as opposed to reconciliation and reintegration of the two religious communities. This problem is not unique in Indonesia where there is a tendency to channel funds and resources into programmes able to produce visible results in comparison to reconciliation and reintegration where measures of success are more subjective and require long-term focus.

Key problems aired by the participants echoed much of what was reported in a joint report produced by Bappenas, UNDP and LIPI in 2005. As noted in the latter titled, 'Overcoming Violent Conflict: Peace and Development Analysis in Maluku and North Maluku, Vol. 4,' key issues linked to peacebuilding initiatives included lack of coordination between district and provincial authorities, and the various stakeholders; lack of follow up by the various ministries on the central Government's conflict recovery efforts under Inpres 6/2003; too much emphasis on rehabilitating physical infrastructure rather than prioritising economic recovery of communities; lack of coherence in the responses of donors and international NGOs ; corruption of IDP funds; and complaints around the exclusion of and lack of consultation with local communities in the decision-making and planning processes. Four years after the publication of the report, the same issues were raised by workshop participants. For resources on violent conflict in Maluku, please refer to the [Indonesia conflict management literature review](#).

### ***B. Positive conflict management initiatives in Maluku***

The participants agreed that there have been several positive efforts on conflict management both during and after the conflict. The case of the Wayame village was cited as a success story in terms of community-based conflict management. Villagers came together, during the conflict, to form a team, 'Team 20', composed of 10 Muslim and 10 Christians. The team was responsible for verifying information that entered the village, aimed at provoking fighting between the two religious communities. Rules were also enforced such as the prohibition of any derogatory remarks on religion, and punishment by the village head of potential violators, including public caning and ostracising from the village.

The Baku Bae Movement is another community-based initiative regarded highly for its peacemaking efforts and believed by many participants to have facilitated the signing of the Malino II Agreement. The Movement provided an interesting alternative to normal conflict resolution methods. Its principles and methods were based on *baku bae*, which in the Maluku culture describes the peaceful spirit used in children's games to restore friendship after a quarrel. The Movement was started by civil society actors from Maluku supported by a disparate group including activists from Jakarta, local traditional and religious figures,

members of the women's movement, youth groups, academics, lawyers and journalists. Meetings were held amidst tense situations between the two religious communities when peace was a sensitive issue. The meetings, organised by the Movement, helped to diffuse tension and rebuild trust. It also laid the foundation for further peace efforts.

There have also been numerous interfaith dialogues between the Christian and Muslim communities, as well as other programmes to promote greater understanding between the two sides. The local Government has also held several trainings for its staff on a range of issues relevant to women and children caught up in violent conflict. Women have played significant roles conflict resolution and peacebuilding at the community level, particularly in promoting reconciliation through daily interaction and trading on the markets. They have recently held the first Maluku Women Congress to discuss political, economic and social issues.

*"The conflict management efforts in Maluku are like pieces of jigsaw puzzle that do not fit to form a big, coherent picture."* - Workshop participant

## IV. Recommendations

Several recommendations were put forward including:

- Members from the central Government and the negotiating teams involved in the signing of the Malino II Agreement should be held accountable for the implementation of the latter although workshop participants are aware that this is a challenge. Local members of the negotiating teams from the two religious communities should hold a series of meetings to review the implementation of the Agreement and identify areas that need improvement. Results of the meetings should be shared with the local Government for action to be taken. NGOs should also be involved in this initiative as they may be able to assist with capacity building and working with the community through their networks.
- The local Government needs to review its approach to IDPs. Efforts of non-governmental actors in recommending the implementation of a regional law (perda) to the local Government in order to regulate the reintegration and relocation of IDPs, was underlined. However this suggestion was turned down on the basis that IDPs are regarded as a temporary problem. The presence of IDPs in Maluku however has become permanent. Ten years after the conflict, many still refuse to return to their hometowns due to persisting trauma from the conflict and the perception that the Government is unable to defend their rights.
- There is a need for more vigorous consultation as well as coordination among different levels of government and between governmental and non-governmental actors on peacebuilding and conflict management in Maluku. The lack of coordination usually means an overlap of efforts or waste of resources. It also means that the provision of assistance does not meet the needs of the local community. For instance, as part of its conflict recovery efforts, the provincial Government decided to build a new school in Kota Ambon without consulting the government officials in the city. There was no urgent need for a new school as the conflict had not affected the operation of the existing school in the area. As a result, the facilities of the new school were under-used.
- The local Government should move away from physical reconstruction to community empowerment and capacity building. The local communities need to be empowered, particularly in the economic sector. For example, the local Government should be encouraged to review the training syllabus it provides, evaluate its impact and the compatibility of the training with the needs of the local community.
- All levels of government should address the problems of poverty and youth unemployment. Youth are vulnerable to external exploitation of religious divisions unless their energy and time are put to good use. Suggestions included making education accessible by providing financial assistance or setting up a programme in collaboration with NGOs to allow these youth to attend schools while earning their own income.
- The local Government should use regional autonomy to ensure greater efficiency in the provision of governmental services and avoid competition for resources between the different parts of Maluku which may cause conflict. The creation of new districts

or sub-districts, referred to as *pemekaran* in Indonesia, may also heighten segregation. Numerous reports have been written on the problematic implementation and interpretation of the regional autonomy law and recommendations have been put forward to revise some of the law's articles to avoid broad interpretation and friction between central and local governments.

A controversial example of this is the case of Tual and Maluku Tenggara (Malra). In April 2007, a group of politicians lobbied for the creation of Tual as a municipality. Tual is the urban centre of Malra where most facilities are situated. Malra is on the periphery of an area that saw intense fighting between the Muslims and the Christians in 1999. If Tual secedes, the drawing of borders may leave Tual with a Muslim majority and Malra with a Christian majority. This may be further aggravated by the religious and political calculus hovering in the background.

## V. Conclusion

While many conflict management efforts are ongoing in Maluku, a key concern remains the lack of coordination between these efforts or programmes, resulting in an ineffective implementation and less than optimal outcomes. Outstanding problems such as the status of IDPs, segregation between the two religious communities that still persist in some areas, and high percentage of unemployed youth, have also been cited as factors that can be exploited by spoilers to stoke the fires of conflict.

A challenge during the workshop was to keep participants focused on the topic of conflict management initiatives to date and recommendations to improve these efforts. Participants seemed preoccupied with the multiple causes of the conflict and the problems that arose during the latter as well as with those responsible for the deterioration of the situation. It thus appears that participants have yet to achieve closure on the conflict and its aftermath. This in itself is an issue that has to be addressed to achieve sustainable peace in Maluku.