



19 February 2010 - The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Center for Peace Education and Theology Department of Miriam College held a forum promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation among the youth.

Held at the Miriam campus in Quezon City, the forum is part of the Philippine Government's ongoing campaign to educate Filipinos, especially the younger generation, on interfaith dialogue as a way to peace.

It also aimed to promote the vibrant partnership between the Philippine Government and the civil society to advance the interfaith dialogue movement in the country.

The Philippines will host the Special Non-Aligned Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development (SNAMMM) on March 16-18 at the Philippine International Convention Center in Manila. There will be a parallel civil society event to be attended by various national and international faith-based groups on March 16.

The NAM National Organizing Committee is headed by Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Rafael E. Seguis who sits as Secretary General. Undersecretary Seguis is also the Chairman of the Government Peace Negotiating Panel in the ongoing peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

In his presentation, DFA Assistant Secretary Leslie Gatan gave the students a brief history of the Philippines' involvement in interfaith initiatives at the local, regional and global levels.

"The Philippines has been doing interfaith dialogue since the 1960s when the Philippine Constabulary launched an ecumenical union of world religious leaders to promote understanding. As foreign policy is an extension of national policy, in 2004 the country called for the participation of the religious sector in the United Nations and that Resolution was adopted by consensus," he explained.

Assistant Secretary Gatan also lauded the efforts done by the religious community on interfaith dialogue, saying that "while only 25 percent has been documented, there are others who continue to tirelessly work and are our unsung heroes towards peace."

Also present during the forum was Miriam Center for Peace Education Executive Director Loreta Castro, Peacemakers' Club Executive Director Marites Africa, and Silsilah Dialogue Movement Representative Father Renato Ventajar.

Ms. Africa shared the story of her involvement in interfaith dialogue and her personal journey to inspire other Filipinos to join the interfaith movement. For his part, Father Ventajar stressed that conflicts cannot be solved by violence and that Silsilah envisions a life in dialogue for all peoples of all faiths.

During the forum, students asked questions such as the prospects of the current GRP-MILF peace talks and the perceived focus of interfaith initiatives in Mindanao. END