

Concept Note

International Conference on Women, Peace and Security, October 28-30, 2024

Equal Access International

Panel Topic: Women Peacebuilders & Peace Educators Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Mindanao (90 minutes)

Beginning in 2020, Equal Access International (EAI) has implemented Communities and Schools Leading in the Fight against Terrorism (CS-LIFT), a Social & Behavior Change informed intervention that utilizes peace education paired with media and direct engagement with key actors, to shape attitudes, open minds to pro-social alternatives, increase critical thinking about malign influences, and create spaces for at-risk populations, particularly young women, to engage constructively in their communities. Drawing on best practices tested and adapted during the project's first two Phases (2021-2024), CS-LIFT Phase III (2024-2026) works through the education sector and local governance structures to reach vulnerable youth in the southern Philippines' Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and Region XII. CS-LIFT prevents and counters violent extremism by facilitating and amplifying credible and influential voices, particularly young girls' and women's voices, across trusted online and offline platforms, countering the spread of violent extremism ideology and activities, and involving parents and community/religious leaders, thus creating preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) ecosystems in vulnerable communities.

Working throughout Mindanao since 2018, EAI uses an empowerment framework to position communities to develop agency, self-responsibility, and a commitment to nonviolent pathways for engagement and expression. Through research with current and former terrorists, EAI has mapped out common influences, impulses, and assets between the processes of empowerment and radicalization to provide a framework for contextualizing and transforming often-destructive processes and behavior associated with youth radicalization towards alternative pathways that reorient youth away from violence.

At the International Conference on Women, Peace and Security, EAI will present the CS-LIFT Toolkit, as well as our Messaging Hub Approach (via the OURmindaNOW Messaging Hub) to community engagement and movement building as backdrops through which to highlight the role of key women peace builders and educators in preventing and countering the spread of violent extremism in Southern Philippines.

Specifically, panelists' remarks will address the following:

- **CS-LIFT Toolkit on P/CVE for Secondary Schools.** In the development and usage of the toolkit, women have been front and center as peace education experts and public-school teachers designing, providing content, and implementing the Toolkit. The Toolkit ensures the use of gender-sensitive language in all the modules coupled with gender-fair visual images in the learning material. Issues in relation to women and girls are discussed in the toolkit. A Module on Respect for Sexuality delves on the aspects of gender-based violence and child and early forced marriage (CEFM) faced by girls in Mindanao. It is accompanied by a radio drama entitled "Acceptance Letter" which explores the story of a young girl who is off to be

married to an older man. The CS-LIFT Toolkit values the different roles of girls and boys in promoting a peaceful environment in their schools and communities.

- **Peace Promotion Fellowships (PPF).** EAI believes in the ability of young people to influence change in their communities. Through PPFs, young men and women are provided a platform and space to implement innovative peace ideas as solutions to local challenges in their communities. As one PPF intervention example, young Moro women from Marawi successfully implemented a project focused on madrasah education which led to the development of a proposed public policy to improve madrasah education in the Bangsamoro region. When we invest in the ideas of young women, we allow them to support their communities.
- **OURmindaNOW (OMN) Messaging Hub.** A strong network of women leaders from partner civil society organizations serve as focal persons in the OMN Messaging Hub. These women leaders from different faith traditions in Mindanao are key actors within the larger interconnected information ecosystem of the Messaging Hub, as well as strategic CS-LIFT partners.

Facilitator: *Ahmed Harris Pangcoga*, EAI-Philippines Country Director

Panelists:

- *Brian Adam Anay*, CS-LIFT Project Lead and EAI Program Manager
- *Female Public School Teacher from a partner CS-LIFT School.* To share as someone who implemented and used the CS-LIFT toolkit in the classroom; will discuss and share the impact brought to students and parents as well, as well as the usability of the material and why it should be scaled to more schools.
- *Young Moro Woman Peace Promotion Fellow from Marawi:* To share about the experience of being able to be supported on her ideas for change and how she is able to use all the technical and life skills learned in the fellowship into her role now as a community peacebuilder and change agent.

Discussants:

- *Carla Koppell*, Managing Director, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace & Security, Vice Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and EAI Board Member
- *Graham Couturier*, President & CEO, EAI