

# Peace Negotiator: Delia Salminang

A trained mediator is leveraging a tiny investment of US foreign aid to end violence and conflict in the Sarangani province of the Philippines.

US foreign aid works best as a tool in the hands of the right local leaders—those trying to solve their own problems in their own nations and neighborhoods.

The “Lost Command” of the New Peoples Army, a Maoist rebel group in Mindanao, and the Philippine military’s relentless pursuit of them, caused Delia Salminang and the B’laan people to forego any semblance of normalcy in their lives for a long time. After Salminang became a community dispute mediator as part of the Barangay Justice for Peace Project, supported by USAID, skirmishes in her community came to an end.

In 2010 Salminang became part of a network of thousands of citizen-volunteers built over the past decade across the Philippines. Popularly known as Barangay Justice Advocates, these trained mediators promote peace through settling disputes at the community level and prevent them from escalating into violence.

The Mindanao Development Authority, the government agency where Salminang lives, reports that the Barangay Justice Advocates have managed over 10,000 cases, with a remarkable resolution rate of 94 percent. The project has been cited for crime and conflict reduction in many parts of the Philippines, as well as improved local-level planning and budgeting.



Delia Saminang

## POVERTY-FIGHTING FOREIGN AID IS <1% OF THE US FEDERAL BUDGET.

### COMPARE THIS TO:



Americans spend as much on candy—\$30 billion annually—as the US government spends on foreign aid.<sup>14</sup>



Americans spend as much on maintaining their lawns—\$30 billion annually—as the US government spends on foreign aid.

From Oxfam publication, “Foreign Aid 101.”

After Saminang, a widowed mother of six, was trained and certified through two Philippine non-profits, the Gerry Roxas Foundation and the Conrado and Ladislawa Alcantara Foundation, Inc., her skills were put to the test when the two combatants came to her in 2011 and shared their wish to lay down their arms.

Salminang heard the two women’s concerns and desires for a more peaceful life and were assured of their sincerity to surrender. She then accompanied them to see the mayor, the Hon. Victor “Tata” James B. Yap, Sr., who would decide whether they could re-join the community. Mayor Yap heard them out and assured the two women that they could be reintegrated on two conditions: first, they must

surrender their arms, and secondly, convince the other members of the NPA “Lost Command” to surrender as well.

Upon hearing his decision, the two women set off back up the mountain to find their former squad commander. Salminang went with them.

Walking hours through perilous mountain passes, they arrived at the two ex-combatant’s old camp in Bonbongon on June 24, 2011. Because of heavy rain, the three women stayed there for three nights. Over this time, Salminang spoke with and listened to each of the others in the camp, 15 men ages 19-45. She learned that most of them joined the NPA because they had been abused, raped, or suffered injustices that they thought at the time could never be resolved in the Philippine justice system. As the rain wore on, Salminang enabled them to admit another very difficult truth—the path they had followed as “rebels” had brought them to a worse fate, one in which suffering came through denied opportunities to be part of loving families and for employment and education.

Once Salminang had counseled everyone, the group noticed that the rain had stopped. It seemed more than coincidence.

Salminang and the 17-member “Lost Command” walked down the mountain to regain their freedom. The talks continued and when the rebels surrendered, the violence that had reverberated through Salminang’s ancestral land stopped. Delia not only enabled and accompanied 17 people to regain a new life; she also gave lasting peace and newfound hope to her beloved community.



Through the support of Mayor Yap and the government amnesty program, the “Lost Command” members have pursued new livelihoods and a chance to lead a better life. Delia Salminang is now the Deputy Mayor of Glan, representing the B’laan and other indigenous peoples.

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In recent years, the US government launched policy reforms that make US foreign aid more accountable to you, US taxpayers, and local leaders like Delia Salminang.

Aid works best when it supports local actors to take action and change the circumstances which place or keep them or their fellow citizens in poverty. Supporting effective aid now reduces the need for more aid later.

That’s why Oxfam America is working to deepen the US government’s commitment to making aid more effective. **Tell Congress: Don't cut aid. Keep investing directly in heroes like Delia Salminang.**

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**HEADQUARTERS**  
226 CAUSEWAY STREET, 5TH FLOOR  
BOSTON, MA 02114-2206  
(800) 77-OXFAM

[www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)

**POLICY & CAMPAIGNS OFFICE**  
1100 15TH STREET, NW, SUITE 600  
WASHINGTON, DC 20005  
(202) 496-1180