

## **WHAT BINDS IS GREATER THAN WHAT DIVIDES US**

Conference on Asian Development and Peace, January 29, 2016

### **ADePT: How it all began**

The concept of what is now Asia for Development and Peace (ADePT) germinated in early 2013 under the International Studies Program of the Center for People Empowerment in Governance ([www.cenpeg.org](http://www.cenpeg.org)) which has Political Parties and Electoral Reform, Governance and Local Governments, Foreign Policy and Security, Peace Process, as well as Community and Socio-Cultural as other policy study areas. Alongside CenPEG's engagements in the 2013 automated elections, the International Studies Program took a special interest on the maritime disputes in the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea) as these quickly evolved into core security concerns in Southeast Asia / Asia involving not only ASEAN and China but also the US and Japan. With the exchange programs and people-to-people relations that CenPEG had established in Asia particularly with China, Japan, Indonesia, and other ASEAN countries (as well as the US and Europe), CenPEG's NGO partners, think tanks, and academics began exploratory discussions on forming an Asia-wide consortium for development and peace centering on state-to-people (Track 2) and people-to-people (Track 3) relations.

Our policy engagements found CenPEG Fellows sitting as resource persons at congressional hearings on foreign policy issues including the SCS disputes and on a new defense cooperation deal between the Philippines and the US. CenPEG's policy advocacy on international affairs also complemented various issue analyses and statements as well as media interviews that were publicized locally as well as internationally (such as New York Times, BBC, Al Jazeera, Australia's ABC News, and some major China publications). The peak of CenPEG's international policy engagements included presentations at various conferences and forums in academic, civil society, and other venues on specific issues involving Asia, ASEAN, Philippines-China, and US-Philippine relations.

The confluence of the maritime disputes attended by escalating tensions, the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015, the renewed engagement of Japan in Southeast Asia as the US moved forward its rebalance in Asia strategy, and other major regional events were compelling reasons to bring these issues not only in the discourse of Philippine issues but also in regional platforms. It became a particular objective in the formative stage of ADePT to look at the raging issues from various perspectives and to seek people-centered solutions. Of great importance, is to pose the challenge, "What binds is greater than what divides us" and to seek answers not just from the policy views of governments concerned but from communities of peoples whose stake in the regional issues has not been well defined and their voices not fully articulated. Central to the people's stakes and voices are issues on development and peace – development that requires peace, and peace based on human growth and development.

Initiated by the Fellows of CenPEG, the formation of ADePT has been made possible in partnership with its network of NGOs, think tanks, and academics. The Conference on January 29, 2016 in cooperation with the Asian Center and the Office of the President of the University of the Philippines augurs well for the beginning of a meaningful in-depth discourse on a common major concern on development and peace in the region with a multi-track direction. We commit ourselves to the ADePT advocacy to bring these urgent issues to a new level. The power dynamics of China, the US, and Japan at the center of the discourse in the Philippines and Asia that we want to bring forward for popular engagement constitutes a big challenge. Development and peace are a continuing challenge in the Philippines owing to the prevalence of economic disparities, social inequities, as well as divisive politics and armed conflicts which are all core issues during elections. We share these issues with most of Asia that are made more difficult because of complex economic and security relations we have with powerful countries. These are issues that bind us with other Asian countries as do our common history and aspirations.