

Philippine Interns Study the Legislative Process Challenge

Most of the Philippine's Muslim minority population live on the island of Mindanao. This region has been economically and politically disadvantaged for decades as a result of violent conflict between Muslim separatist groups and the Philippine government. Disenfranchised due to the island's politics and economy, many Muslims believe the Philippine government ignores Muslim concerns and interests. The region's continuing depressed conditions are conducive to recruitment efforts of terrorist groups.



Photo: USAID/Virginia Foley

Interns Nur-Ain Mohamad, Samera Bari, and Farrah Hadji listen intently for lessons on how government works

It's wonderful. I'm hoping that this opportunity will grow so that my brother and sister Muslims can participate."

- Cairon Ali, intern

Initiative

The Philippine Government and USAID are placing special focus on the conflict areas of Mindanao in an attempt to accelerate economic growth and promote peace. USAID, in partnership with the Speaker of the Philippines House of Representatives, recently launched a congressional internship program bringing recent graduates from universities in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao to Manila for the opportunity to acquire hands-on experience in the legislative process.

The participants, mostly from remote provinces, are identified as future leaders by university chancellors, thesis advisors, and political and civic leaders. Many of those eligible for the program have completed graduate degrees in mass communications and public administration, and have volunteer experience with local governments and non-governmental organizations. During the four month internship, each is assigned to a specific House committee, subcommittee, or office, and is introduced to a broad range of national issues.

Results

The interns are excited about their unique opportunity to learn how government works from the inside, and to share their view with Philippine policy makers. Program graduates believe that their improved understanding of government will allow them to contribute more effectively to the development of their home provinces. While expanding their knowledge of how decisions are made in the Congress, they have shared Muslim concerns with key lawmakers and thereby increased understanding of Muslim culture. The initial success of the program has prompted USAID and the Philippines House of Representatives to extend it. Current plans are to offer internships to at least thirty young Muslim scholars each year.