

Box 3.8 Mindanao, Philippines

Since 2004, the International Monitoring Team (IMT) has provided support to an intermittent and frequently stalled peace process between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao. Talks between the two groups have repeatedly fallen apart, most recently in 2008, with resulting violence killing 200 and displacing hundreds of thousands. When President Benigno Aquino III took office in June 2010, he announced that resolving the conflict in Mindanao would become a priority for his administration, giving new life to negotiations.

The 1996 peace agreement signed by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the government of the Philippines established the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). This agreement did not satisfy the demands of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which splintered from the MNLF in 1978 and continues to push for an autonomous substate with devolved control over major aspects of governance. After several failed attempts at negotiation between the government and the MILF, talks brokered by Malaysia resulted in both parties agreeing to establish the International Monitoring Team in 2004. Negotiations have since broken down, in 2006 and again in 2008, after which the IMT's mandate expired without renewal.

International Monitoring Team (IMT)

• Authorization Date	22 June 2001 (Tripoli Peace Agreement)
• Start Date	October 2004
• Head of Mission	Major-General Mahdi Yusof (Malaysia)
• Strength as of 30 September 2011	Military Observers: 38

Hostilities continued until both parties agreed to a new round of peace negotiations in 2009, which led to the renewal of the IMT's mandate in 2010. The mandate was again renewed in February 2011 for twelve months.

The IMT comprises representatives from Malaysia, Brunei, Japan, and Libya and, as of 2011, the European Union and Norway. Indonesia is in the process of joining and Saudi Arabia is also expected to join, which would bring the team to a full strength of sixty personnel.¹

Despite its small size, the IMT has played a critical role in monitoring the cease-fire between the government of the Philippines and the MILF and in investigating violations. In 2010 a civilian protection component was created within the IMT. Composed of nongovernmental organizations, this component is designed to ensure that both parties comply with their international obligations to protect civilians.

Peace negotiations, which were restarted in early 2011, have been delayed by the government's concern over the Malaysian facilitator, who was replaced in April. In mid-August the process halted again when the MILF announced that it would not accept the draft proposal prepared by the government because it excluded the creation of a substate with governance authority. The fragile peace process deteriorated further in October when renewed fighting between the MILF and government forces left nearly thirty dead and forced thousands to flee their homes. It also prompted the first government air strikes against the group since 2008.² Negotiations resumed in November and the IMT is investigating the clashes; however, the hostilities, the worst seen in recent years, have dashed popular support for a negotiated settlement with the MILF.

Notes: 1. International Crisis Group, "The Philippines: Back to the Table, Warily, in Mindanao," 24 March 2011, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/B119-the-philippines-back-to-the-table-warily-in-mindanao.aspx>.

2. Jason Gutierrez, "First Air Strikes on Philippine Rebels Since 2008," *Agence France-Presse*, 24 October 2011.