

FEMALE CHANGE-MAKERS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Graduate Institute Oral History Project



Arizza Ann S. Nocum

Date: 5. November 2024
Place: Online (Philippines/ Switzerland)
Interviewer: Victoria Krüger

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID)
Geneva, Switzerland

PREFACE

The oral history below is the result of a recorded interview with Arizza Ann S. Nocum, conducted by Victoria Krüger on 5. November 2024. This interview forms part of the Female Change Makers in Oral History Project. Readers are reminded that they are engaging with a transcript of spoken language, rather than formal written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and authorised by the narrator.

BACKGROUND

The *Graduate Institute Oral History Project* is a collection consisting of oral histories collected by students and researchers at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies as part of their coursework or research projects. The narrators come from diverse backgrounds and recount a wide range of different trajectories, allowing us to see a broader spectrum of historical experience. Part of this collection is the *Female Change-Makers in International Relations Oral History Project*.

Female Change-Makers in International Relations Oral History Project

Have you ever come across a book profiling recent female change-makers in international relations, particularly peacebuilding? The odds are low. Women's roles in this area have long been limited, with their formal involvement generally beginning in the early 20th century, and it was not until the 1970s that women started holding senior positions. Even today, female perspectives in international relations and peacebuilding are scarce: in 2023, only 20.54% of ambassadors and permanent representatives were women, and only 13% of negotiators and 6% of mediators between 1992 and 2019 were women.

Who are these few women serving in these roles today? What drives them, and can they inspire future generations?

This project aims to:

1. Preserve the voices of current female change-makers in international relations, capturing their contributions for future generations.
2. Explore and contextualise their perspectives on challenges, opportunities, and essential skills in this field

NARRATOR

Arizza is the Co-Founder and President of KRIS, a non-profit organisation that promotes peace through education and youth leadership in the Philippines.

Founded in 2008, KRIS has trained over 1,000 Filipino youth on peacebuilding and leadership; provided seed grants to youth organisations implementing their own projects for peace; launched education initiatives such as libraries and scholarship programs; and reached millions through online and offline information campaigns promoting positive values.

In 2021, KRIS was recognised as one of Ten Accomplished Youth Organizations (TAYO) in the Philippines and received the YouthLED Democracy Award from The Asia Foundation. The organisation has also worked with and received support from the European Union, the United Nations, One Young World, and more.

Arizza is one of ten young leaders selected by the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to eradicate violent extremism through the global Extremely Together initiative.

For her work, Arizza has been awarded as one of Ten Outstanding Students of the Philippines; the University of the Philippines' Gawad Tsanselor Para Sa Natatanging Mag-aaral; and one of five global recipients of Zonta International's Young Women for Public Affairs Award. She has also been inducted to Tatler Asia's Gen. T List as one of Asia's most promising young leaders.

She is the Managing Director of DIGInspire, a communications agency providing strategic marketing services to top organisations across diverse industries in the Philippines. DIGInspire has led campaigns promoting new methods of farming, responsible tourism, health and nutrition, children's rights, and more.

INTERVIEWER

Victoria Krüger is a Master's student in International Development Studies at the Geneva Graduate Institute, holding a BSc from the University College London with additional coursework from Harvard Extension School. She is deeply passionate about peacebuilding - particularly mediation DDR, and gender. Victoria has gained professional experience with UNDP, PwC, the German Government, the ICRC, and UCL's Centre on US Politics. She was also a columnist for UCL's The Diplomacy Review and currently leads the Mastering Mediation Team as part of the Peacebuilding Initiative.

FORMAT

The recording is in MP4 format and has a duration of 48 minutes.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW AND TIMESTAMPS

1. Upbringing and Family [00.00 - 7.50 min]

- Arizza's childhood was shaped by her parents' interfaith marriage - her mother, a Muslim Tausūg from conflict-affected Mindanao, and her father, a Catholic from Zamboanga. Raised in a neutral, interfaith household, she experienced lessons from both religions.
- When she was small, her family moved from the southern Philippines to Manilla.

2. Motivation and Start of Journey [7.50 - 16.40 min]

- She recounts the strong contrast in the experience of going to school between these places, which left her feeling privileged and guilty.
- Arizza received a scholarship for her university education, which made her feel "too lucky" and as she would have to demonstrate a "return on investment". Especially her school teachers instilled in her a sense of responsibility to give back through their moral leadership.
- Additionally, conversations with her journalist father helped her realise her purpose would be tied to something "bigger than herself".
- These experiences motivated her to co-found KRIS (Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library).

3. On Creating Change [16.40 - 23.50 min]

- Arizza reflects on learning to ease self-imposed pressure, embrace lifelong learning, and value relationships while recognising that change takes time.
- The significance of collaboration and protecting inner peace has also been an important lesson, which for her means taking breaks to rediscover motivation and centre herself.
- KRIS started as a family initiative in 2008. It was during college that she became more engaged in KRIS and started to head the organisation.
- She started a scholarship programme but, realising how difficult it was to sustain the scholarship programme solely based on donations and crowdfunding, decided to register KRIS as a nonstop nonprofit in 2014.

4. View on Peacebuilding [23.50 - 34.20 min]

- By 2020, a grant from the EU in partnership with the Kofi Annan Foundation allowed them to scale their impact. However, concerns over funding remain despite having become a more established organisation, and she wishes for more responsive financing.
- Arizza also acknowledges personal financial difficulties working in the nonprofit sector, which led her to establish a marketing agency.
- The inclusion of women, youth, and indigenous groups would be another challenge to peace across the world - an issue whose repercussions she has personally experienced.
- With KRIS, she follows a vision of peace that is achieved through education that nurtures values and character, empowerment of individuals to lead and support one another, and collective efforts to create sustainable solutions.

5. Young Women in Peacebuilding [34.20 - 43.10 min]

- Arizza describes the peace and development sector, particularly in the Philippines, as an "old boys' club," dominated by older men, making it feel exclusionary.
- She discloses incidents of harassment in professional spaces, including inappropriate physical contact, unwanted comments about her body, and advances.
- As a young woman, she often feels like an imposter, with her ideas discounted or tokenised.

6. Advice for Future Peacemakers [43.10 - 48.00 min]

- Arizza draws her courage from striving to show up as her best self and overcoming stereotypes by demonstrating competence and passion for her work. She shares how her capabilities are questioned for her Filipino background - such as assumptions that Filipinos are only suited for domestic work or surprise at her fluency in English.
- She emphasises the importance of crafting a strong personal narrative, perseverance, staying true to her mission, as well as using difficulties and failures as learning opportunities to grow stronger and more effective.

TRANSCRIPT

The initial transcription was produced by Descript; edited, and reviewed by Victoria Krüger. The transcript was written with the primary objective of readability whilst striving to recognise distinctive language patterns to honour the narrator's character and represent non-verbal communication deemed meaningful by both the narrator and the interviewer. Readers are, therefore, strongly advised to listen to the recording to gain a fuller impression and understanding of the interview. The transcript has been reviewed and approved by Arizza Ann S. Nocum.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FOOTNOTE CITATION FORMS

Audio recording

Bibliography: Arizza Ann S. Nocum. Interview by Victoria Krüger. Audio recording, 5. November 2024. Female Change-Makers in International Relations Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Arizza Ann S. Nocum, interview by Victoria Krüger, audio recording, 5. November 2024, Female Change-Makers in International Relations Oral History Project, IHEID, interview 1.

Transcript

Bibliography: Arizza Ann S. Nocum. Interview by Victoria Krüger. Transcript, 5. November 2024. Female Change-Makers in International Relations Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Arizza Ann S. Nocum, interview by Victoria Krüger, transcript, 5. November 2024, Female Change-Makers in International Relations Oral History Project, IHEID, p.xx.

Narrator: Arizza Ann S. Nocum

Session: 1

Interviewer: Victoria Krüger

Date: 5. November 2024

Location: Manila, Philippines/ Geneva,
Switzerland

Q: Today is the 5th of November, 2024. We're actually in two places: We're in Geneva and Manila. And today, I have the honour of interviewing Arizza Ann Nocum on the topic of Female Change-Makers in International Relations. The project here takes a subject-oriented approach but also a life history approach, which means that we will cover the topic of female change-making international relations but also have a look at your broader life trajectory and how the specific topic kind of fits into your story.

So, I would really like to start at the beginning and look at your upbringing [laughs], your family. And I guess my first question would be whether you can tell me something about your upbringing, your family environment, and perhaps how you were as a child [laughs].

Nocum: Thank you, Victoria, and I'm so happy to be part of this and to be able to contribute my story to this oral history project.

So, maybe my peacebuilding and my advocacy journey really began in my childhood. My parents come from two different religions, and they also come from areas of the Philippines - in the southern Philippines in Mindanao - that have been badly affected by conflict and terrorism for decades. So, my mom, she's Muslim, and she's part of an indigenous group called the *Tausūg*. They live in a province in the Philippines that has been known to be a hotspot of terrorism and extremism in the Philippines and even within the region. And meanwhile, my dad is a Catholic, and he also comes from an area of the Philippines called *Zamboanga* that has also seen its fair share of war and conflict and it was interesting to hear about their story. Because when they met, they came from

these two different religions. They came from conservative families, but in spite of that, they fell in love, and they decided to get married and start a family together. And I think what was more interesting was that if you consider the backdrop of their love and their marriage, they still decided to create a family with two religions. So, my siblings and I were actually brought up with two religions.

It was interesting growing up because our home was considered a neutral space where we didn't have any religious symbols or religious icons, which you would find [elsewhere]. We celebrated both holidays and celebrations in Islam and Christianity. And we were taught lessons from both religions, both from Islam and Christianity. We got lessons from both the Bible and the Quran.

It was interesting growing up because, actually, I felt that these two religions had more similarities than differences. But it was also difficult to grapple with that observation because around our home, there was more conflict and tension: between the two religions, and between people of different backgrounds and beliefs and political ideologies. There was all this conflict going on, but in the middle of it, we were sort of lucky to have a home that found peace.

That was really the motivation for creating a solution to the conflict, and the war, and these tensions that were happening all around us. We wanted to do something about it, and we wanted to bring what we were able to find in our home to the people outside of our home.

Another motivation, I think, was the chance of having an education. In the Philippines, the access and quality of education are not that great. But, my parents were able to get a college education and they were one of the few graduates actually, in their generation to be able to complete college in their extended family. It was a big deal to have a college education, and this allowed them to have upward mobility in the socioeconomic ladder. You know, this enabled them to have good work, good livelihoods, which helped them fund and finance their family and eventually, you know, their progress through life.

And it was the same for me. I had the privilege of getting a good education and good schools in the Philippines. And sadly, I couldn't say the same for a lot of other kids that I grew up with. For instance, my cousins, a lot of our relatives, our childhood friends, they didn't have the same opportunity to have a good education.

The impact was quite big. For instance, I found a lot of opportunities to find good work after university, whereas they wouldn't have access to those same opportunities because they didn't have a college degree for instance. The importance of education really was central to how our family found itself rising out of poverty.

And I think these two things, the interfaith aspect and education, clicked when, in 2008 - um, so around that time - we founded, or we decided to start a non-profit organisation called KRIS (Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library). The long name is the Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library, or we call it KRIS for short, and our objective was really to use education as a pathway to peace.

We started by building libraries around the Philippines and it was sort of an extension of our home. So, we had this home where we had this interfaith harmony, and we decided, as our first project, that we would start these libraries where we would invite young people, kids of different religions and backgrounds, to come together and learn together, and to have this space. To have access to education through books and computers, but at the same time be exposed to different cultures and different ways of life, that would hopefully help them create friendships and connections - building peace in their communities.

So, I think I'll stop there for now. Yeah. Cause I have so much more to say [laughs], but if you have follow-up questions, yeah, that'd be great.

Q: Thank you so much for sharing the aspect of, yeah, of having a safe space at home and perhaps then feeling the urgency of creating this somewhere else, in an environment where you didn't see it. And, on the other hand, coming from a place of privilege and wanting to create that environment

also for others. Maybe, could you expand on the surroundings that you were confronted with?

Where you didn't see perhaps this safe space, but also where you saw that you could take action?

Nocum: Okay. So, one thing about my family was that we actually moved locations. We are one of many, many, many families who decided to leave that area in the southern Philippines to seek better opportunities and to also find a home outside of all the conflict and tension that was happening. We eventually moved to Manila.

So, I could very, concretely compare my childhood growing up in Manila, where it was relatively safe, secure, and progressive, versus the childhood of my relatives, my friends, who grew up in the southern Philippines, especially in communities that were directly affected by conflict.

I saw, in like 20-plus years, the progress in Manila: the progress of commercialism and more and more establishments popping up, traffic increasing, et cetera. I was living in a secure environment and I didn't have to worry about how to go to school. I was able to go to these good schools and I was able to have all the resources I needed to have an education. Whereas the people that we sort of left behind [indicates quotation marks] - my relatives, my friends - they lived in communities where it was very insecure. So, for instance, it was normal to go inside a public school, an elementary school, and see that you had soldiers around - armed soldiers. Sometimes, even Marines, when there was an alert going on.

It was normal for them to see that. It was normal for them, for instance, to wake up to the sound of gunshots. And it was also normal, for instance, to have classes get suspended because of a bomb threat. So these things were things that they continued to grow up with, and I honestly felt so [sighs] privileged to have not had the experience of much. But also guilty that, you know, I could not share the security that I found living elsewhere.

And poverty also continued to be a very constant reality in their lives. So for instance, I was able to get a college education, I had these resources I needed. I was being brought to school with a vehicle that was easy to access.

Whereas my cousins or even my childhood friends, they would have to walk sometimes for 30 minutes or more, even hours, to go to school, just because there wasn't public transportation. They studied in public schools that didn't have books or computers and sometimes didn't even have enough teachers. They would, they would, you know, um, they would sometimes drop out of school or have to take side jobs just to finish their education or maybe drop out of school because they couldn't afford to continue. They would also have quite a lot of difficulty just having, you know, the basic resources needed to complete an education, like notebooks and books and school supplies.

So growing up, especially when I was younger, it was like, night and day for me. And that was a big, big part of the reason why we really wanted to work in this space between education and peacebuilding.

Maybe this is going forward a bit, but I was able to get the scholarship to probably one of the best universities here in Manila. I was able to study for free basically, for five years of university. And I, I felt that I was too lucky, too lucky. It was such a rare opportunity, especially in the context of what I know that young people like me experience.

So, at that same time, we decided to start the scholarship program in our organisation to help young people coming from conflict and poverty-affected areas finish their education. So eventually, and through several years, we were able to help 400 students get a scholarship. And these students came from preschool to university.

I remember, around the time that I graduated from university, I felt more proud of our scholars who finished university than I was graduating with my own degree, from my own university, just because I knew that I was lucky. I mean, it was challenging, but it wasn't that hard for me to finish.

Whereas, in their case, we did give them a scholarship to finish college, but at the same time, I saw with my own eyes their daily struggle to make sure that they had money for themselves, they had money for books, they had money to feed themselves through school, to get the requirements, to have internet connection. So, it was these small daily struggles that added up. And I think at the very end, like, I just felt more proud of them, basically.

Q: That is an incredible impact that you made. I had the pleasure of reading about the impact of KRIS, and just the number of people that you were able to give that opportunity is amazing. I really - I can't find any better words than, than amazing [laughs]. Perhaps I cannot relate, but I understand how you felt at that moment. Just seeing how their life trajectories had changed through that opportunity that you gave them.

I would wonder how you initiated that change. Because there's a difference between observing what is happening around you and feeling the responsibility of having to take action and actually creating that initiative and producing that kind of change. What do you think was a factor that facilitated your role in all of this?

Nocum: Yeah, I think one big factor was being able to personally go to school for free. So I'm just going to expand on what I said earlier. From high school to university, I was actually able to study for free and that's very rare in the Philippines. I was able to pass entrance exams to very competitive public schools that were considered the best in their category, basically. I felt that I really had to pay it forward. Like, I remember in high school and university - I know that like the, the value, the monetary value of like the free education I got. And I remember thinking there needs to be sort of a return on investment that because I got this education for free that (was) paid for by taxpayers in my country, I needed to prove that I could somehow be a worthy investment from those taxpayers. So, that was one big motivation.

And I also credit my schools and my teachers for never letting me forget that. Because in the schools I attended, they would really tell you that, "Okay, you are excellent students. You're smart.

You passed these exams. But it's not just a privilege. It's also a responsibility.” So I think the moral leadership and the moral example that my teachers set, some of whom also graduated from those same schools and then came back to teach, was amazing. For instance, one of my teachers from high school - he actually took his master's [at] Harvard. And he could literally work anywhere in the world, in any company he could choose. But he went back to the Philippines and would teach and still worked with Filipino students, young Filipinos. So that was a clear example to me of - okay, this paying it forward in the flesh.

So I took a lot from that. And I also think, that my parents were a big part of it. I mean, aside from the fact that we started the organisation together and their love story was the inspiration for all of this.

My dad was also a journalist and he made me very, very conscious very early in my life of all these social issues, like all these inequalities, corruption, governance, and how it affects people. So I remember having dinner conversations with him, even though I was super young, like six or seven years old, where he'd tell me about what article he was working on or the issues he was writing about, and then he would try to make me understand. So, that was a big factor. I think I was very young when I started to have this sort of consciousness of something bigger than myself. And it's really stuck with me. Like, I feel like my sense of purpose is always tied [to] something bigger than myself.

Q: May I ask whether this feeling of responsibility has also perhaps caused some pressure, yeah, a negative feeling of “You really have to do this now. There's no way back. This investment - this business phrasing that you used [laughs]”.

Nocum: Oh yeah, definitely. Like, for a very long time, I felt like, you know, the stereotypical Asian kid who had to be good at what she wanted to do and excel at it. And, it was ironic because for several years working on KRIS, working at being a good youth leader, working on making a

difference, and working in peace, I felt I didn't have inner peace. Because I was putting too much on myself. I was pressuring myself to achieve goals and sometimes, sometimes I would pressure myself to try to do these things alone. So it's quite a long process of one, understanding that the changes that I want to see are not going to happen overnight - and maybe they would happen in decades, and maybe I won't see the impact of what I'm able to do while I'm alive. That was one reality realisation.

The second realisation was that I really couldn't do it alone. So I think sometimes there's a tendency to want to go fast and break things, and there's a tendency of thinking of that as like a one-person process where you're like the hero in your own story. But then I figured out that it was counterproductive to my journey and to my cause to try to do it alone. So now I work with more people - we work with more partners, we work with more organisations. And it's helped us accelerate our impact so much, even if I'm not directly involved.

And then I think the third realisation was that I have to protect my inner peace. And that means slowing down. That means listening to myself and taking a break. That means even maybe spending months away from work just to sort of find my centre again and find my motivation again and then come back with like a renewed commitment to what I want to do.

So it's been a lot of recalibrations over the last few years, and I think since I started working in the space [when] I was 14 - that was like 2008 - I have changed so much in the process. And I guess what I learned is this is a lifelong journey. And since I think I'll be doing this for most of my life, I don't have to rush so much into it right now. And kind of also look at the other things in life that matter, like people and relationships and vacations and all that stuff.

Q: It's interesting. You talk about the recalibrations and finding your inner peace to build also resilience in order to continue your journey.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: You had told me about - that we, that's how you refer to it - initiated KRIS. And I was wondering whether there were actually different stages. Who's the 'we' first of all? And, yeah, was there like from having an idea to having these large projects - how, how did the progression look like?

Nocum: Yeah, great. In the beginning, 'we' really meant me and my parents. My parents and I started working together to start this organisation. But in the beginning, it was really just a family thing. So, when we started putting up libraries - these peace libraries, like around 2008 - we did everything within the family and just sort of got donations and resources from people around us, like friends and relatives. And people my dad knew from like the media industry or people he would meet as a reporter, as a journalist.

It was really a household thing that we did. But I appreciate that my parents were quite committed to it. I think they also saw what I saw, you know, that contrast of how blessed we were and how privileged we were versus the reality of a lot of people that were living in these conflict-affected areas that were so close to home and that didn't really get the same opportunities that we had. So, I know that we shared that perspective.

But then things evolved when I went to university. Because when I went to university, my parents got busy because we had a third sibling on the way [laughs]. We had like a baby brother to now take care of. They also got busier with work. And I think they realised that I started to be more passionate about KRIS. I started to initiate a lot of things on my own, and I had the unique position of being of the same age as the people that we were working with on the ground. So our beneficiaries, our volunteers - we were the same age. I knew them. I knew it would be an asset to use me to kind of bridge that between us and the beneficiary.

So, in university, I started to head this organisation - this very small family-run organisation - and that's when it started growing outside of the family. In university, I was able to connect with other young leaders and students, and that helped me attract more volunteers and support for our organisation.

But we did continue to stay driven by personal donations, small fundraising activities and we would get support from partner organisations. And that's when we started the scholarship program and honestly, the funding for that - if you're running that through like personal donations and fundraising campaigns - it was very, very difficult. I remember so many times [when] I felt so exasperated because I needed X amount of funding, but I just couldn't find it. We weren't a registered nonprofit organisation. So, there was an added problem of having to go through paperwork and having to submit documents that we didn't actually have.

So it was, it was very difficult. And I think that was one of the turning points of realising that we had to become a more formal entity - from being a family entity into this bigger entity where we had volunteers and we had officers. We became registered.

We were registered in 2014 officially as a nonprofit organisation, a nonstop nonprofit in the Philippines. And that's when we started to get more institutional support. So, we started to attract partners, we started to get bigger funding, even from organisations, and we started to have the support of organisations like the Kofi Annan Foundation.

But through the years - it wasn't actually until 2020 - when we got our first big grant from the European Union in partnership with the Kofi Annan Foundation. And I think from there - that kind of like solidified our position as an established nonprofit. Like we're still a small team, but because of that grant, we could show that we could get institutional funding and also have projects that were of a wider scale.

So, for instance, from that grant from the European Union, we were able to start the training program - to train a thousand young leaders in peacebuilding in the Philippines - and we decided as well to provide seed grants to youth organisations that are working for peace in their own communities. We're a big believer that these training programs - these capacity-building exercises - they shouldn't just end as an exercise. They should really continue with funding and support for those youth that got trained. So, we delivered on that: We supported these youth organisations with the seed grants and we continue to support them. And we have stayed connected with them, even though the project funding ended in 2022. And, we also, during that time, ran a bigger information campaign around peacebuilding basically in the Philippines.

We've continued to get the opportunity to get these kinds of funding, but I wouldn't say that it's gotten easier. I think it's just new challenges, especially now - sustaining the momentum from past projects, trying to get new support and new funding for these new ideas like educating youth on voting and the elections ahead of next year.

And I think it's also a constant process of trying to find our niche. Especially with the problems in the world evolving rapidly. Like, for instance, in the Philippines, the big problem in the conflict space a few years ago was more on violent extremism and the impact of groups like ISIS - on armed groups in the Philippines. But now the concern is different. The problem is more of, for instance, land issues that have evolved into violent conflict. And also political issues that are evolving into violent conflicts. So, like the problems change. So, we also have to change. And I think that means that, you know, we constantly have to redefine ourselves to make sure that we continue to solve the problems that we see around us. So, I guess it's a very slow progress.

And, I think on the personal end, I also have to disclose that I realised that it was very difficult to support myself financially - just working in the nonprofit sector with the decision to stay in the Philippines. Because sadly, working in the nonprofit sector here - it doesn't pay ridiculously well. So I decided to also have a business. I run a marketing agency with my partner, and that's helped me

have a more sustainable source of income and also have the flexibility to continue to work on KRIS. So basically, it's like I have two jobs. And I'm very lucky to have these two jobs, but at the same time, it also points towards there being maybe not compensation enough in general for people working in the development sector - especially if you're part of these smaller NGOs.

Q: I was wondering seeing your LinkedIn profile, why there is KRIS, plus full-time employment in the marketing agency. Yes. Now you telling this, it does absolutely make sense.

And I was wondering, what are the challenges that now lie ahead? And what kind of change would you've liked to see but were unable to attain? What do you think prevented that change from happening?

Nocum: So, maybe in the evolution of KRIS, I would just maybe summarise a bit where we are now. So, we've figured out that we have three pillars. Our first pillar is to educate. We provide still education support to young Filipinos, especially [those] coming from conflict-affected areas. We previously did this with our library and our scholarship program. Now, we still provide, for instance, books and other educational resources to students in these areas. But at the same time, we want to go a step further, and we work with youth organisations and give them seed grants and support to help them in their own education initiatives. So, it's more like a bottom-to-top approach in how to provide that education support.

And then our second pillar is to empower. So, we've continued to have these capacity-building programs for young people to help them become leaders and peacebuilders. And again, we provide seed grants that help them actually bring their ideas to reality. And we've created a network of the 1,000 leaders that we've supported before that continue to work on this. So, we regularly interact with this network to make sure that if we can, we will support the work that they do in their communities. So, for instance, even when we finished the project with the European Union, this network continued to be active. So now, when there are natural disasters in their areas, when they are in need of support funding for a certain peace or education initiative when there needs to be first

aid or medical aid - we either provide that ourselves if we can or we get other members of the network to help. So, it's an active community of young leaders helping each other who are more focused on peace and education in the Philippines.

And our last pillar is to inspire. We create information campaigns and information materials that help teach peace in the Philippines, particularly for young people.

Our sort of grand vision is to create a movement of young people who are active peacebuilders.

And it's not peace in the way that we conceive it of, you know, working at the level of the UN and preventing violence. It's really a more holistic kind of peace where we have sustainable development, where we get education that's not just reading and math and science. An education that's very holistic, that focuses on values and character, and that really gives us that inner peace.

And we also want to help develop young leaders who are not just working in peace and education but are active in solving problems in other spaces, whether that's climate, health or other things. So it's really a movement of young peacebuilders, who are supported by us and who also support each other.

So, I think that's like the long story short.

You talked earlier about the challenges and maybe what needs to be done. I think one thing is really inclusion. The inclusion part is interesting because it's an inclusion that has to happen on so many levels. Young women, women in general, youth in general, and even people representing marginalised groups like indigenous communities, are very much still marginalised and excluded from a lot of discussions and decisions around peace and development.

And this is true for the Philippines and many other parts of the world. I mean, when we heard Mary Robinson¹ talk about how the problem of war and conflict, and global conflict - it's not gender

¹ Ms. Mary Robinson, seventh president of Ireland. She held the 2024 Kofi Annan Geneva Peace Address at the Geneva Peace Week.

neutral. It's true that inclusion has to happen - by listening to more of these voices, by elevating these voices and these people to more positions of power and where they could make decisions, where they could influence policies, and also by removing or addressing the social and cultural realities that still prevent inclusion. So, I mean, very honestly, there are still religious practices and beliefs that, for instance, discriminate against women. And you can find this everywhere. And the odd thing is that you can also find it now in Western society with more and more people, particularly those with far-right views, who are now critical of feminism or feminist movements. So, there has to be that continued momentum for inclusion.

And I think secondly, funding has to be very responsive to what is actually needed. I think this is a bit more difficult because, of course, you know, funding - especially from the multilateral organisations, from big NGOs - a lot of it is because of geopolitical realities, priority set by people in Europe, people in the U.S.. But somehow, we need to find a way to make it more responsive to the needs especially of those people, who don't usually get funded. And that includes, again, women and youth and marginalised communities. That would be something that would be great to see, that funding would be made available even to people who don't usually get that kind of funding. So I think I would stop there. Yeah. But definitely, for now, these two big challenges: Inclusion and more responsive financing.

Q: Absolutely - this intersection of youth plus being a woman. I guess this is just this double, barrier to change. Maybe, on a personal level, have you experienced in this field of international organisations, in this field of peace and security, discrimination, sexism, any stereotypes?

Nocum: Yeah, yeah. So, yes to all. Maybe I will start with a religious perspective. So, since I came from an interfaith family, I kind of see the perspective from both sides. But particularly in the Philippines, because we're a majority Catholic country, there's a lot of discrimination still against Muslim Filipinos.

For instance, there have been many experiences where if I join my relatives, who are obviously Muslim because they wear the hijab or other clothing, they do get discriminated against when they go outside. Like, you can hear whispers of people saying: Oh, they're terrorists; oh, they're violent. Or, you can see people physically avoiding them in public: like in public transportation or in some public areas. So there's still really that ingrained, um, bias and prejudice, especially when Muslim Filipinos go to areas that don't have a lot of Muslims. So that's still a problem.

When I represent two religions, I also get discriminated against because there are hard-line religious people who believe that I shouldn't exist or my family shouldn't exist. So there's also that perspective of like, "Ok, you're either Muslim or you're Christian, and you can't be in-between", or "Your family either has to be Muslim or Christian, and there's no interfaith. Like it shouldn't exist." It's also interesting to see the views around that because, definitely, if you have still views like that, how can you create a multi-faith, multicultural society? So, I've also, been on the receiving end of those kinds of remarks.

For instance, for my graduation photo from university, I made two versions. In one version, I was wearing a usual graduation outfit. I was wearing a traditional Filipino attire. And then another one was that I was wearing an attire that was Muslim. Basically, that [represented] my Muslim heritage, my Muslim identity, and I was wearing a hijab in that photo. And I put the two photos side by side. And while most people got the message of peace and harmony, a lot of people also commented online, things like "Shame on you, how can you do this to our religion?" or "You should not exist" or, um, "Your parents are non-believers, and they should rot in hell for what they've done". Certain things like that. It was, you know - it was, um, interesting to see that kind of hate happening online as well.

So there was that, like the religious questions and doubts that happened because of this interfaith upbringing.

And then on the aspect of being a woman, I do feel that especially here in my personal experience in the Philippines, if you look at most decision-makers and leaders in the peace sector, in the development sector, particularly in the government, it feels like an old boys club. Because they're majority male and majority older as well. It does feel not very inclusive.

And there have even been scenarios where I go to certain events where maybe I'm usually the only woman or the only young woman and sometimes I feel uncomfortable and there have even been, um, cases of, I would say harassment.

But, um, I'm not sure if this is something I would like to include in the public recording, but just to let you know within events that are of the development sector, so events basically where, you know, like Geneva Peace Week, where it was all development professionals or people working in the industry around peace and development. I've had physical harassment. I've been inappropriately touched. And I've also had unwanted comments about my body or unwanted advances. Um, so it's, it's very, very ironic for me when I see it happen or when it happens to me or to other people because you're in a group that professes to support things like female empowerment and female inclusion and gender, and diversity. But somehow, people are still people, and they still do things that, uh, are very, very far from what this community or this network stands for.

So that's like a woman's perspective.

And I think the last one, like particularly as a young woman, there have been many times where I felt like I [was] an imposter. Simply because I'm being questioned about my expertise and my ideas. Because I'm young. So it feels like in some circles, even in the development sector, I feel like my ideas are discounted or sometimes I even feel like I am tokenised. Like, "Okay, you're there as a young person, as a young leader, but you're there at the side panel", "you're there at like the side event", or, "Okay, let's put a young person in this photo, but they don't actually have any bearing on whatever resolution this panel or this committee is gonna do".

And it's not just my experience. It's also the experience of other young people working in the sector. So I think there's still really a long way to go in addressing all these issues.

Q: May I ask, do you think that's more common in the Western, like [the] Swiss environment, or have you equally experienced this in your home country?

Nocum: Well, um, to be honest, the experience of being uncomfortable as a young person and as a young woman is more common here in the context of working in the Philippines. Um, the particular times when there were unwanted remarks or sexual advances happened here but also happened in other countries where, you know, there were maybe participants from the Global North, who were making things uncomfortable. Not just for me sometimes, but also for other female participants.

But definitely. I'm not going to skirt around it. I think more often than not, here, in countries like the Philippines, where there are certain social and cultural practices, or even sometimes religious beliefs that are still against, the inclusion and empowerment of women or young people - things like this are more common. And I guess that only goes to show how much more effort needs to be made in countries like mine to make sure that this inclusion actually happens.

Q: I also find it, and I would love to hear your take on this, incredibly difficult as a woman to react to this. You're expected to behave in a certain way and react to uncomfortable remarks in a certain way. And then maybe to also, take the courage and go against this and delineate your boundaries and just voice your concerns - this isn't something that naturally comes to, I would say, particularly with young women. So it just, it's, it's incredibly difficult.

And I have to say, it also happened to me that I found myself in these situations. And I also had friends that did tell similar stories. To my understanding, that is just how we're socialised. And it just adds another layer of, um, difficulty to these situations.

Nocum: Yeah.

Q: But perhaps maybe a last question. Where do you take the courage to go the extra mile knowing that in some events, you might be tokenised, be okay with this, and ask in the next event to go further and to actually have a say? Just where do you take that courage from?

Nocum: I think my motivation is just - I mean, it sounds cliché - but I really try to show up and be my best self. I didn't mention this before, but I think one thing that has also worked against me is the expectation of, for instance, my background - coming from the Philippines, coming from the Global South. Being in situations where, for instance, everybody around me has an Ivy League degree or was educated in institutions in the U.S. and Europe. Everyone around me is, I would say, white. Everyone around me is coming from stereotypes, for instance, where, in their context, they know Filipinos as domestic helpers, or they know them as nannies, or they know them as maybe people who are not as educated as they are. So I'm also kind of trying to overcome that, um, cultural perception.

And I have nothing against all my fellow Filipinos who are working these very difficult jobs. My mom used to work as a nurse in the Middle East and I know that it's incredibly difficult. You know, working these very physical, very demanding jobs all over the world and being separate from your family.

But the reality is that we do get stereotyped on the basis of these kinds of jobs that Filipinos are doing so well - to work in different parts of the world. And I admire my fellow Filipinos for it. But I've also been at the receiving end of being questioned, just because this is the country that I come from. That even though I'm extremely proud to come from this country, to have lived and been fully educated in this country, I still get doubted just for it.

Like, one of the things that I often get asked, and this happens very often I think more often than more often than being doubted as a young person more often than being doubted as a woman. I often get asked, "Why are you so good at speaking English?". As if that was something that would

come up rare or would be so like exceptional, you know, coming from a Filipino. So, it hurts, actually, every time I hear that.

And I, sometimes the follow-up question is, "So I guess you studied in the US or in Europe, right?" [Laughs] - Which I didn't. So again, I would connect it back to showing up and being my best self. Because I think if I can radiate how passionate and how competent I am for the job at hand, whether it's to speak on a certain topic or whether it's to present or pitch a proposal, then I think things work out in the end.

I've been privileged to have this background and these skills and also, you know, the motivation coming from my family and from my schools. But at the end of the day, I have to put all of that together and just make a really good story and keep telling that story in the best way possible. And it takes a lot of effort. It takes a lot of being determined through failures and the doubts of other people. But it does work in the end. Just doing your best and trying to tell a good story. And I think, most importantly, showing your genuine commitment and your sincere commitment to whatever change it is you want to see.

Q: Would you maybe summarise this?

Nocum: I guess, to summarise, I would just say that throughout my experience working in peacebuilding and education as a youth leader, the thing that helped me keep going is to let the difficulties and the failures fuel me further. I kind of turned them on their head and used them as encouragement. That, if I encountered a challenge or a difficulty, I would try to let it teach me and make me stronger and make me better so that when the next challenge comes around, I'm better prepared and more often than not, I can get things done better and succeed.

Q: Arizza, that is incredibly well put, and I thank you so much for your honesty, authenticity, for sharing your experiences, and [for] making this conversation very meaningful. At least to me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

APPENDIX [TO BE REMOVED FOR THE PUBLIC ARCHIVE]

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW RELEASE AND CONSENT FORM

Interviewee Name (please print): Arizza Ann Nocum
Address: 9A Dona Isidora Street, Quezon City, Philippines
Telephone number: +639298163918
Email: asnocum@krisforpeace.org

I (interviewee) voluntarily agree to participate in an oral history interview with Victoria Krüger. I know that I have at all times the right to withdraw from participating in the research project and can decide not to answer any question in the interview, without having to state the reason.

Further, by signing the form below, I understand that the following material may be created as part of the interview process or may be donated as items supplementary to the interview:

- An audio recording
- An edited transcript, abstract, field notes, short descriptive essay, and/or tape log
- A photograph or other still image of me
- Personal documents of my choosing

I acknowledge that these materials may be used whole or in part by the interviewer for educational purposes including, but not limited to: MINT 359. Also, by signing the form, I irrevocably assign to the interviewer all copyrights I control on any recordings, notes, transcripts and/or photographs made during this project. I give permission of the use of the materials listed above can be published on the following platforms:

IHEID Oral History Archive ☒ yes | no

Spotify ☒ yes | no

Youtube ☒ yes | no

Newspaper ☒ yes | no

I also understand that I have the right to review the materials before publication.

Date, Place: 29 October 2024, Philippines

Interviewee's Signature: 

Figure 1: Oral History Interview Release and Consent Form