



USIP facilitates a commander coordination meeting between Philippine security forces and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) commanders on July 24, 2024, in the Bangsamoro region, Philippines. Photo taken by USIP contractor.



Aliyah Adam, director of USIP's implementing partner in the Philippines and 2024 John Lewis Peace Fellow, looks on as local community members sign a pledge of commitment to peaceful and fair elections in 2025 during a USIP-sponsored outreach event.

CURRENT SITUATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Once a U.S. colony and now a U.S. treaty ally, the Philippines sits at the heart of geopolitical contestation in East Asia. It is also home to a half-century old internal conflict that has long spawned transnational threats to global security.

In the South China Sea, Beijing's aggressive and destabilizing actions threaten regional peace and stability as well as the nearly one-third of global trade volume that passes through these waters. The Philippines' efforts to stand up to Chinese aggression have yielded some success, but the support of the U.S. and other allies is vital to protecting Philippine sovereignty and preventing conflict.

On the southern island of Mindanao in the autonomous Bangsamoro region, a peace agreement signed in 2014 between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the central government has survived attacks by local ISIS affiliates, threats of ceasefire breakdowns, and other tests. Both sides are hopeful they can end nearly 50 years of conflict and bring lasting peace, which could in turn free up vital national security resources to address new challenges posed by China. Peace would also reduce transnational threats that emanate from instability in the region, including global terrorism links and narcotics trafficking.



The Philippines stands at a crossroads. Lasting peace in the Bangsamoro and successful defense of its waters could see America's oldest treaty ally emerge as a leader for peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. Failure to meet either challenge could have devastating consequences.

USIP'S WORK

USIP is playing a critical role as a trusted partner to governments and ex-combatants alike. From the Presidential Palace in Manila to the most difficult-to-access communities in Mindanao, USIP facilitates direct action to tackle the most pressing challenges.

Promoting Regional Peace and Stability. USIP works closely with the Philippines government on initiatives that support the U.S.-Philippines alliance as well as build connectivity with other U.S. allies and partners. We work to strengthen relationships with communities most affected by China's destabilizing and coercive actions in the South China Sea, especially in waters of the West Philippine Sea.

Supporting the Bangsamoro Peace Process. USIP uses its unique relationships and institutional flexibility to facilitate meetings between ex-combatants and national government security forces. These meetings enable the two sides to coordinate operations in overlapping areas of responsibility, sustain a precarious ceasefire, and respond to crises instigated by ISIS-linked militants. We also support joint quick response teams made up of members from both sides who respond to and prevent violence during election seasons, including the region's first parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2025. USIP hosts dialogues and other outreach activities to strengthen relationships between Philippine security forces, ex-combatants, and local communities and publicly demonstrate a shared commitment to peace in areas where ISIS-affiliates seek to derail the peace process.

Advancing Peace Education and Sustaining Peace. USIP works with the Mindanao State University (MSU) System on peace education curricula that will impact how a new generation understands peace and conflict in Mindanao. With 11 campuses and thousands of students spread across mainland Mindanao and neighboring islands, the MSU System is the largest and most influential node for public education in the immediate region.