



Southeast Asian
Women Peace Mediators



Five Years of Practice

Undertaking mediation, negotiation,
and facilitation practices to support the
work for sustainable peace.

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Foreword by Retno L.P. Marsudi

On the fifth anniversary of the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators (SEAWPM), I am honoured to reflect on how far we have come and why we began. As Indonesia's first woman foreign minister, I saw clearly that women negotiators and mediators remained underrepresented across our region. If peace is to be sustainable and inclusive, women must be present and empowered to lead.

The spark was lit in January 2019, when we organised a regional Women, Peace and Security (WPS) training in Jakarta. Participants came from all ASEAN Member States, plus Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. Those days of learning, site visits, and exchange revealed both the depth of women's experience and the absence of a regional platform to connect and elevate it. Later that year at the UN General Assembly, the question became urgent: Other regions had women mediator networks. Why not Southeast Asia, where peace processes and conflicts touch all our societies?

We set out to build a network that was credible, regional, and practical. During the pandemic in 2020, consultations continued online to identify respected practitioners who combined community knowledge with international experience. From the start, we agreed the group must be independent, substance-driven, and not a token list. Indonesia helped anchor the network in the regional architecture without compromising that independence, including formal recognition in ASEAN Chair's Statements and ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Communiqués and close links with the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation and the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks.

Today, SEAWPM mediators are deployed across shared regional challenges and beyond. They bring together local insight, technical skill, and trusted relationships to every table. Partners such as Australia recognised early that this model embodies Women, Peace and Security in action.

The mediators themselves continue to build trust in fragile environments and introduce new perspectives in seemingly hopeless situations. They detail strategies that turn fragile connections into lasting channels, implement principles, and guide stakeholders towards viable solutions. Throughout, SEAWPM's strategy remains consistent: de-escalate violence, protect civilians, and foster ongoing dialogue. Each incremental step matters, measured in lives protected, communities engaged, and dialogue sustained.

I am profoundly proud of what these mediators have built, proud of the regional ownership they represent, and confident that their fierce, independent leadership will continue to open space for dialogue, protect communities, and advance peace across Southeast Asia and the globe. Their work is not just a promise of peace; it is a blueprint for achieving it.

Retno L.P. Marsudi, Foreign Minister of Indonesia 2014–2024



Foreword by Senator the Hon Penny Wong

On behalf of the Government and people of Australia, I congratulate the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators (SEAWPM) network on its fifth anniversary and commend you for the work you do to advance peace across Southeast Asia and the world.

We know that gender equality is a stronger predictor of peace than a nation's wealth or political system. We know that peace agreements are more likely to last when women can participate in them. And we know that gender equality and women's full and equal participation and leadership reduces poverty, strengthens social cohesion, unlocks economic productivity and enhances prosperity for current and future generations.

From the outset, Australia recognised that SEAWPM embodies the core principle that underpins the Women, Peace and Security agenda: that women's leadership in conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution is fundamental to achieving sustainable and inclusive peace.

Women mediators' networks create a multiplier effect: amplifying local voices, building collective capability, and shaping regional and global policy. What sets SEAWPM apart is its grounding in lived realities of Southeast Asia. It is an initiative that reflects the region's own voices, priorities, and aspirations.

Through targeted diplomacy and trauma-informed dialogue between conflict parties, SEAWPM offers a trusted platform in some of the world's most complex and protracted conflicts.

Because of these deep community ties and trusted relationships, SEAWPM engages in ways that are agile, context-sensitive, and informed by lived experience. This work complements – and strengthens – regional, national and community-led diplomacy and development efforts, creating a powerful and practical force for peace.

This is more than a network. It is a catalyst for resilience, inclusion and leadership, contributing to a peaceful, stable and prosperous region.

By amplifying women's voices and embedding their expertise in mediation and conflict prevention, SEAWPM is helping shape a future where peace processes are more representative of the communities they serve – and more likely to succeed.

Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Foreign Minister of Australia

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We are also deeply grateful to the wider group of interviewees, partners, and collaborators whose perspectives helped situate SEAWPM's work in broader regional and global context: Rizki Amalia Affiat, Ashley Banister, Jaivet Ealom, Ambia Perveen, Kartika Budhi Wijayanti, Netta Loevy, Marc Njoh, Nida Shoughry, Nikki Singer, Prabha Sankaranarayan, and Adhyanti Sardanarini Wirajuda.

Our sincere thanks as well to the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, along with the many colleagues, partners, and peace practitioners who have accompanied SEAWPM's work over these first five years.

This paper is offered in recognition of the courage, care, and persistence of all those who continue to create space for dialogue, dignity, and peace in difficult times.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFTF	Afghan Future Thought Forum
AHA Centre	ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management
AM	Member of the Order of Australia
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN-IPR	ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
CPCS DFAT	Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
EU	European Union
InteGRAL	Intersectional Gender Research Advocacy and Learning
MBBI	Mediators Beyond Borders International
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
RCC	Rohingya Consultative Council
SEAWPM	Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators
UN	United Nations
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Introduction

Formed in 2020 at the initiative of Indonesia's then Foreign Minister, Retno L. P. Marsudi, the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators (SEAWPM) emerged to recognise, connect, and support women already deeply engaged in conflict resolution across Southeast Asia.

Over its first five years, SEAWPM has grown into a trusted regional platform working between formal diplomacy and informal mediation practice. Small in size and practitioner-led in design, it has accompanied dialogue processes, opened political interfaces in fragile contexts, contributed analysis and institutional support, and expanded recognition of women's leadership in peace and security across Southeast Asia and beyond. Much of this work has happened quietly, by design, but its effects have been significant.

SEAWPM is distinctive not simply because it is a group of women mediators, but because of how it works: in personal capacities, across formal and informal tracks, grounded in lived experience of conflict, and guided by trust, discretion, and practical problem-solving. It was never intended to become a large convening platform or a symbolic network. From the outset, it was shaped as a working mediation cohort, focused on what is possible in complex situations and on how peace efforts can be supported without seeking the spotlight.



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Shadia Marhaban interacting with the participants at the first Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum on peace.

This paper reflects on SEAWPM's first five years of practice. Bringing together the voices of mediators, partners, and collaborators, it explores two central questions: what are SEAWPM's core approaches and principles, and what has the group achieved in practice? In doing so, it also considers SEAWPM's wider significance within regional diplomacy, including its role in strengthening Women, Peace and Security efforts in Southeast Asia and offering a regionally grounded model of mediation with wider global relevance.

As SEAWPM enters its next phase, the paper also looks ahead to the challenges and possibilities ahead: deepening conflict complexity, shrinking civic space, geopolitical fragmentation, and the urgent need for mediation approaches that are adaptive, relational, and politically grounded.

Box 1. SEAWPM Terms of Reference: Mandate, Vision and Aims



Who we are

The Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators (SEAWPM) is an independent group of leading practitioners from across the region. Our members serve in their personal capacities, offering a distinctive and neutral regional perspective. SEAWPM leverages deep expertise in mediation, negotiation, and conflict transformation, grounded in the lived realities of Southeast Asian peace processes.



Vision

SEAWPM recognises that conflicts in the 21st century are complex, multidimensional, and not bound by geography. Its vision is to support the transformation of violent and protracted conflicts through facilitation, mediation, and negotiation practice in pursuit of sustainable peace.



Aims

SEAWPM aims to:

- facilitate and engage in initiatives that prevent or reduce the escalation of violent conflict
- support efforts to resolve violent and protracted conflicts through mediation, negotiation, and dialogue
- advance the inclusion and meaningful participation of women as mediators and negotiators in all phases of conflict resolution and peace processes

Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators in a working session, mapping out strategies, possibilities, and resilient capacities.



PART I.

Origins and Design



Early engagements shaping SEAWPM. Mediator Shadia Marhaban in discussion with H.E. Retno L. P. Marsudi, laying the groundwork for a regional network of women mediators.

1.1 The Spark in Jakarta

In early 2019, a small team in Jakarta organised a regional Women, Peace and Security training. Five participants came from each ASEAN Member State, with Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea joining as well. Buses travelled out to Sentul and back to Jakarta. The sessions explored peacekeeping, deradicalisation, and the many ways women were already holding communities together. The energy in the room was unmistakable, but so too was a question that kept surfacing.

“Why do other regions have women mediator networks, but not ours in Southeast Asia,” recalled Adhyanti Sardanarini Wirajuda, then Deputy Director for ASEAN Political Cooperation at Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and now Director for ASEAN Economic Cooperation. The idea was brought to the then Foreign Minister Ibu¹ Retno L. Marsudi. She listened and agreed the gap was clear. The region had conflicts and peace processes. It also had women with deep experience in negotiation and peacebuilding. What it lacked was a platform that recognised that expertise and connected those already doing the work.

“We wanted a space for like-minded women working on mediation, not only on women’s issues... It was about substance and credibility.”

Lilianne Fan, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

In 2020, as the pandemic closed borders, calls and spreadsheets replaced meeting rooms. Recognising both the depth of women’s mediation experience in the region and their limited presence in formal peace processes, Ibu Retno initiated the formation of a regional mediation group through her office.

From the outset, the group chose substance over symbolism. It kept an informal, practitioner-led character while remaining able to engage formal tracks when needed. “We wanted a space for like-minded women working on mediation, not only on women’s issues. We wanted to bring our broader conflict and peacebuilding expertise together,” said Lilianne Fan. “It was about substance and credibility.”

¹ The term “Ibu” is an Indonesian honorific used to address or refer to a respected woman.



Emma Leslie is an Australian-Cambodian peacebuilder and Co-Founder of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), with more than three decades of experience supporting peace processes across Asia. She has worked alongside major negotiations involving both state and non-state actors, including the Bangsamoro peace process, and has played a long-term role in Myanmar through analysis, convening, briefing, and dialogue facilitation. Within SEAWPM, Emma has helped shape a model of mediation that is relational, adaptive, and grounded in trust rather than visibility.



ON MEDIATION:

"We need to take our egos out of it and build deeper levels of relationship and connection."



ON SEAWPM:

"We demonstrate what leadership in mediation can look like. When we work together, we expand what is possible for building peace."

This informality was not an improvised workaround. It was a deliberate design choice. In a region where formal mechanisms often carry political constraints, SEAWPM's light footprint allowed it to remain agile, discreet, and practice-oriented, while still maintaining enough institutional anchoring to engage credibly with ASEAN-linked and diplomatic processes.

As Shadia Marhaban reflected, the intention was to build a group of mediators grounded in practical engagement with peace processes. "Ibu Retno recognised that many women mediator networks around the world play an important role in connecting practitioners and sharing knowledge," she said. "But she also wanted this mechanism to actively support mediation efforts in conflict contexts, not only meet and exchange ideas. She trusted us to do that work, and that trust made the difference."

That vision opened doors. "Ibu Retno had seen networks of women mediators globally," said Dr Emma Leslie, AM. "She also understood that ASEAN has formal mechanisms for appointing mediators, but these did not always provide the kind of flexible engagement that was needed. Her idea combined both formal recognition and informal collaboration."

Support soon followed. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provided initial funding as the model began to prove its value, and Belgium quickly matched this with a grant of its own. Reflecting on why the initiative resonated, Ashley Banister, Women, Peace and Security Advisor in DFAT's Gender Equality Branch, explained: "What stood out was its regional ownership, its grounding in local realities, and the elevation of a diverse group of deeply experienced and respected women peace mediators."

And so, the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators took shape.

1.2 Small, Focused, and Grounded in Experience

From the beginning, SEAWPM's membership was shaped around people rather than positions. The mediators joined in a personal capacity, not as government representatives, bringing their substantial experience in mediation, negotiation, or direct support to peace processes. What emerged was a small but carefully balanced cohort. As Miriam Coronel Ferrer put it, "We have a complement of people with backgrounds in peacebuilding, negotiation, conflict resolution and mediation, with grassroots experience in their own communities and international exposure. It is a very good mix."



Shadia Marhaban is an Acehnese peace mediator whose work is shaped by both lived experience of war and direct participation in peace negotiations. She was the only woman representing the armed group in the Aceh peace process and later expanded her work across Southeast Asia and beyond. Within SEAWPM, she brings grounded political experience, quiet authority, and a deep commitment to listening as practice.



ON MEDIATION:

"We listen as much as we can to help transform. It is a contribution of knowledge, capacity and learning that goes both ways."



ON SEAWPM:

"We want to bring Southeast Asian warmth to the world and apply our skills where they are needed most."

"We have a complement of people with backgrounds in peacebuilding, negotiation, conflict resolution and mediation, with grassroots experience in their own communities and international exposure."

Miriam Coronel Ferrer, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

The first invitations in 2020 were extended quietly, through personal conversations rather than public announcements. In Aceh, Shadia recalled receiving a discreet message from Adhyanti Sardanarini Wirajuda.

"She asked if she could gather women mediators," Shadia recalled. "I was surprised because I am from Aceh and wondered why they chose me. Then I heard that Emma Leslie and Miriam Coronel Ferrer were involved. As they are my friends, I realised this was a golden opportunity."

In Timor-Leste, Leonésia Tecla da Silva had a similar reaction. "Being invited was unexpected," she said. "My first impression was that I should do my best to bring the mediation and peacebuilding experience I had in Timor-Leste. I believed I could contribute."



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators with H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi, then Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, during the early formation of the network in 2020.



Leonésia Tecla da Silva

is a Timorese peacebuilder with more than twenty years of experience in mediation, social cohesion, and the empowerment of women and young people. Her peacebuilding journey began during Timor-Leste's struggle for independence and later took formal shape during the 2006 crisis, when she supported community mediation and the reintegration of displaced populations. Within SEAWPM, Tecla brings lived experience of conflict, deep community legitimacy, and a strong commitment to local ownership.



ON MEDIATION:

"Mediation is not something you simply volunteer for. It depends on trust, on what you bring, and on whether people believe in your role. For me, the right approach is to bring in all voices, so that solutions come from those who must live with them."



ON SEAWPM:

"We complement one another, and we really do the work, not only on gender, but in mediation, negotiation, and influencing policy. I am very proud to be part of this group."

Selection was deliberate. Each one with the credibility, trusted networks, and the ability to open doors in politically sensitive contexts. A small cohort of five to seven mediators, later eight, was invited to serve as Co-Founders, bringing their names, experience, and access points without the burden of becoming a large or heavily bureaucratic network. The emphasis on non-state representation was central. "That is very important for me," said Shadia. "We are all representing our capacity, our connections, and our networks to the outside."

"We are all representing our capacity, our connections, and our networks to the outside."

Shadia Marhaban, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

What gave the group its strength was not uniformity, but range. Members brought different forms of political, diplomatic, humanitarian, and community-based experience, and this diversity became part of the model. New members quickly recognised that SEAWPM's value did not lie only in traditional negotiation expertise, but in the breadth of perspectives it could bring to complex peace processes.

When humanitarian and disaster management practitioner Adelina Kamal joined in 2023, she initially hesitated. "I asked why me. I am not a peace negotiator like Miriam," she admitted. But she soon realised that her experience, building ASEAN's disaster management system and negotiating across regional and international levels, was precisely the kind of knowledge the group needed.

In this sense, SEAWPM's strength lay in the way different forms of experience could be brought into conversation and put to work together. As Z Nang Raw, who has held key roles in Myanmar's peace process, put it: "SEAWPM is about combining knowledge and skills to enrich our impact. We work by sharing knowledge and complementing each other."

1.3 Experience Forged in Conflict

What most distinguishes SEAWPM is the depth and range of experience its members bring. Around the table sit women who have negotiated peace agreements, mediated local conflicts, supported refugees, accompanied armed groups, and worked alongside communities in some of the region's most fragile environments. "We bring expertise in humanitarian work, refugees, disaster justice, mediation, peacebuilding and WPS," said Tecla. "Each colleague brings their own strengths."

For Jularat Damrongviteetham, who has spent more than a decade working on conflict resolution and diplomacy in Southern Thailand, that diversity is central to the group's effectiveness. "What stands out is each individual's capacity and experience. Our group includes a former fighter, a former negotiator, humanitarian experts, and strong international and activist networks."

These are not abstract credentials. They are experiences shaped by conflict itself. Raised in conflict-affected Timor-Leste, Tecla carries those memories into every space she enters. "I have witnessed past and ongoing conflict. There were times we were left alone and faced danger. So, when Rohingya, Israelis or Palestinians share their suffering with us, we understand because we have also gone through these things."

"When Rohingya, Israelis or Palestinians share their suffering with us, we understand because we have also gone through these things."

Leonésia Tecla da Silva, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator



Youth participants engage in discussion during the Youth Forum on Peace, Reconciliation, and Social Cohesion in Dili, Timor-Leste, April 2026.

The same is true across the group. Lilianne has spent years alongside Rohingya communities. Miriam draws on decades of negotiating peace in the Philippines. Emma's work spans Myanmar and Mindanao. Shadia lived through the Aceh conflict before later joining the peace negotiations. Nang Raw, now living in exile, witnessed first-hand the collapse and rebuilding of political dialogue in Myanmar. Their connection to conflict is not only professional. It is rooted in survival, endurance, responsibility, and a deep sense of political and moral commitment. As Lilianne put it, "None of us entered this work as a career. It has always been personal, and value driven."

"These women are not outsiders parachuting in. They are of the region and understand it deeply. That is what makes their contribution so powerful."

Prabha Sankaranarayan, President and CEO of Mediators Beyond Borders International

This kind of grounding creates a legitimacy that cannot be manufactured. As Prabha Sankaranarayan, President and CEO of Mediators Beyond Borders International, observed, "They know the region, its context, dynamics and socio-political realities. That matters. We talk about putting people closest to the conflict at the centre of its transformation. These women are not outsiders parachuting in. They are of the region and understand it deeply. That is what makes their contribution so powerful."

That lived experience also shapes how the group practises mediation. For Nida Shoughry, Co-Director of Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security, SEAWPM's strength lies partly in its ability to recognise forms of peacebuilding expertise that formal processes often overlook. "They recognise the contributions of peacebuilders regardless of credentials. They are experts by experience. They do not need formal training. They have been shaped by survival and conflict, and that is no less an accomplishment."

Diversity within SEAWPM is therefore not symbolic. It is functional. Different conflict histories, political experiences, and forms of practice widen the group's collective lens and deepen its ability to respond. Just as important as what SEAWPM chose to become was what it chose not to become. "We also dropped the word network," said Miriam, reflecting on a deliberate choice to avoid becoming a large and diffuse platform. Too often, she suggested, broad coalitions drift into a cycle of events, planning, and discussion without follow-through. "Women already know what to do. You do not need to overthink and keep doing training and conferences without a next step."

Instead, SEAWPM remained small, trusted, and focused on action. Its strength lies not only in who its members are, but in how they work together: as a close cohort grounded in lived realities, connected by trust, and committed to supporting peace efforts where they are needed most.

H.E. Retno L. P. Marsudi receives a warm welcome from women mediators as she arrives at the first Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum 2024, setting the tone for dialogue, collaboration and regional solidarity.



PART II.

Practices and Principles

A photograph of Miriam Coronel Ferrer, a Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator, speaking at a conference. She is a woman with short dark hair, wearing a patterned brown and black top, and is gesturing with her hands while speaking into a microphone. Other people are visible in the background, seated and listening.

Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Miriam Coronel Ferrer speaks during the Thai–Bangsamoro learning exchange, contributing reflections on peace processes, dialogue and comparative learning.

2.1 How SEAWPM Works: Mediation in Motion

Contemporary conflicts in Southeast Asia are complex, layered, and rarely linear. For the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators, mediation is not defined only by formal talks or official negotiation tables. It begins with careful listening, trust, and the ability to recognise openings that may still be fragile or not yet visible.

“We do not arrive with solutions... Our role is often accompaniment.”

Miriam Coronel Ferrer

Miriam described the approach in simple terms: “We use our networks to reach both state and non-state actors, and we do not arrive with solutions. We ask where they are now, what seems possible, and what might come next. Our role is often accompaniment.”

That accompaniment is rarely short-term or episodic. It means staying close to people and processes through uncertainty, helping actors read shifting conditions, and remaining present even when formal progress has stalled. It is work that depends on patience, deep knowledge, and relationships built over time. As Lilianne explains, “If you are not doing the fieldwork, you have nothing real to build on. It has to come from deep understanding, not a superficial reading of the situation, and from relationships that are built patiently over time.”

Such work seldom unfolds in a straight line. As Emma put it, “If we treat conflict like it is linear, we miss the complexity. We are mediating across a system, preparing people, aligning communities, and building readiness.”

That sense of readiness matters. In many of the contexts where SEAWPM works, the task is not to force a process before conditions exist, but to help people recognise possibilities, prepare constituencies, and stay connected long enough for openings to emerge.

Trust runs through every aspect of this work. It carries conversations, creates openings, and allows sensitive exchanges to take place even in fragile moments. As Nida Shoughry reflected, “There is



Miriam Coronel Ferrer

is a Filipino peace negotiator, academic, and global pioneer in diplomacy. She was the first woman in the world to sign a final peace accord with a non-state armed group as chief negotiator, leading the Philippine Government's peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and helping secure the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. Within SEAWPM, Miriam brings exceptional negotiation experience, intellectual rigour, and a strong belief in patient, disciplined process.



ON MEDIATION:

"We begin by understanding where the actors are, what the problem is, and what a possible next step might be. Mediation requires the experience and know-how to help create pathways through conflict."



ON SEAWPM:

"There really is no other network like it. What makes this group so special is the mix of women it brings together, women with experience in peacebuilding, negotiation, conflict resolution, and mediation, rooted in their own communities but also connected to international practice."

something about them that makes you feel you are in safe hands. I am Palestinian, and since the war started, I have been cautious about what I say. But when the invitation comes from them, I know they have thought of everything. I feel safe. Their care, especially for women from conflict zones, is amazing."

That trust also includes knowing when to step back. After the Myanmar coup, women living in exile asked SEAWPM for support in coming together. As Jularat recalled, "We opened the space, left the room so they could talk, and came back later. They needed that." The point was not to occupy the centre of the process, but to help create the conditions in which others could speak, reflect, and reconnect.

This same approach also shapes how SEAWPM engages politically: quietly, relationally, and often through forms of access and influence that remain intentionally out of view.



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Miriam Coronel Ferrer receives the 2023 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Women in Peace-Building, Manila, November 2023.

Case Study 1. Timor-Leste: Accompaniment Across Borders

SEAWPM has supported peace efforts in Timor-Leste by helping address unresolved legacies of the 1999 conflict, particularly questions of return, reconciliation, and reintegration. Working across government, civil society, and affected communities, it has helped reconnect formal peace efforts with the realities still faced by those living with the afterlives of displacement, division, and unresolved grievance.

This engagement unfolded gradually. A listening visit to Kupang in 2023, followed by a dialogue in Dili in January 2025 involving more than 40 representatives from civil society, government institutions, and former resistance movement members, brought renewed attention to stalled reconciliation and repatriation processes. It also highlighted growing interest among some former refugees in West Timor in returning to Timor-Leste, while raising difficult questions about community readiness and institutional response.

Building on this groundwork, SEAWPM convened the Tuban Process in Bali in March 2025. The dialogue brought together 15 participants from government, civil society, former resistance movements, youth groups, and affected communities to address unresolved tensions around displacement, marginalisation, historical erasure, and the right to return. It also marked the first time former pro-independence and pro-autonomy actors had engaged in this kind of structured cross-border process.



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators meet with Timor-Leste Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão during their engagement on regional mediation and ASEAN-related priorities.



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators at a press conference following their meeting with the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste.

As Tecla reflected, “It was the first time all stakeholders from both sides had come together, including militia and resistance leaders, former fighters, and young people. They shared experiences and tears and developed strategic recommendations for the governments of Timor-Leste and Indonesia.”

These recommendations went beyond dialogue alone. They included proposals on truth-telling, legal pathways for return, psychosocial healing, economic reintegration, youth participation, and a Tuban coordination platform to sustain the work.

The process then widened in November 2025 through the Youth Conversation and Dialogue in Dili. Bringing together young peacebuilders, justice actors, human rights defenders, security experts, conflict analysts, and government representatives, the event focused on reconciliation, conflict prevention, and the role of youth in shaping more locally grounded and sustainable responses. By opening space for younger actors to share perspectives and develop recommendations, the dialogue broadened ownership of the process and reinforced the importance of youth-led approaches to reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Taken together, these efforts show SEAWPM’s contribution as both patient and connective: accompanying the issue over time, creating space for difficult dialogue across divides, and helping bridge the gap between community experience and state-level response.



Adelina Kamal is a humanitarian and disaster management practitioner whose career bridges regional diplomacy, crisis response, and peacebuilding. She spent nearly three decades in the ASEAN system and served as the first female Executive Director of the AHA Centre. Her experience negotiating humanitarian access after Cyclone Nargis shaped her conviction that humanitarian, development, and peace efforts must be understood together. Within SEAWPM, she brings strategic fluency across formal and informal systems and a strong commitment to principled engagement.



ON MEDIATION:

"If we monopolise mediation as formal negotiation between formal negotiators, mostly men, look at where the world is now."



ON SEAWPM:

"In our fifth year, we have proved that we can engage with anyone, from prime ministers to refugees in Kupang from pro-militia families. That comes from speaking out of lived experience. We can enter very different spaces, speak openly and bravely, and tell the truth as we see it."

2.2 Quiet Diplomacy

From the outset, SEAWPM has practised a form of quiet diplomacy that privileges impact over visibility. As Shadia explained, "One central element of our work is quiet diplomacy. We push from many directions toward peace. What makes us different is that we can operate at both ends, meeting with people on the ground and engaging in high-level diplomacy at the UN or ASEAN."

This quiet diplomacy depends on the ability to sustain relationships across spaces that are usually kept apart: community realities and high-level diplomacy, official and off-record engagement, and state and non-state interlocutors. Its value lies not only in discretion, but in preserving channels of communication that might otherwise close.

For Adelina, this reflects a broader truth about mediation in difficult contexts. "It is not just formal negotiations between men in suits," she said. "Mediation has to happen on the ground. If we monopolise mediation as formal talks between official actors, mostly men, just look at where that has taken the world." What matters, then, is not only what happens in formal settings, but also the quieter work that prepares constituencies, sustains contact, and creates openings when direct negotiation is not yet possible.

Observers see this discretion not as silence, but as strategy. "Their informality, discretion and reliability help resolve issues," said Adhyanti Sardanarini Wirajuda. "In today's digital world, where everything is streamed live, it is a powerful asset to have a platform that intentionally chooses discretion."

Kartika Budhi Wijayanti of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation offered a similar assessment. "Their strength lies precisely in working under the radar, in that grey area," she noted. "They do not need conventional legitimacy. For SEAWPM, legitimacy is derived from impact, not presence."

"It is not just formal negotiations between men in suits... our existence shows the importance of informal mechanisms like ours to tackle very difficult challenges."

Adelina Kamal, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators Lilianne Fan (R) and Emma Leslie (L) interacting with participants at the Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum on Peace 2025.

That intentional informality is one of SEAWPM's core strengths. Rather than operating as a formal institution, the group works through a constellation of trusted partners, including the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) and the Intersectional Gender Research Advocacy and Learning initiative (InteGRAL). This gives SEAWPM the flexibility and room to manoeuvre that complex mediation work requires. As Emma explained, "Our informality is a strength. It lets us be adaptable, responsive, and create the in between spaces where real work happens."

Informality, in this sense, is not the absence of structure. It is a strategic form of organisation that allows SEAWPM to complement formal diplomacy without being constrained by it. As Adelina put it, "Our existence shows the importance of informal mechanisms like ours to tackle very difficult challenges. Governments cannot speak like us. We are not scripted. We can speak the truth. That is our value."

2.3 Humility in Practice

Humility sits at the heart of SEAWPM's ethos. "We approach people as equals," said Lilianne. "Governments, armed groups, communities, all with dignity and respect. We listen. We allow ourselves to be vulnerable too. That builds trust."

This humility shapes not only how the group relates to others, but also how it understands its role. SEAWPM keeps the focus on the work itself and allows credit to remain with the parties involved. As Nida Shoughry observed, "They are sensitive, and they work without fanfare, but the outcomes are remarkable."

"We approach people as equals. Governments, armed groups, communities, all with dignity and respect... That builds trust."

Lilianne Fan, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator



Z Nang Raw is a Myanmar peacebuilder with more than twenty years of experience as a mediator, facilitator, and civil society leader. Her work brought her into the heart of Myanmar's peace processes, including shuttle mediation between the military and ethnic armed organisations and support to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement process. Within SEAWPM, she brings deep experience of fragile political dialogue, conflict persistence, and the demands of long-term accompaniment in active conflict.

ON MEDIATION:

"You can prepare a framework and a plan, but mediation can never be fully scripted. Once you are in the room, everything depends on the mediator's knowledge and skill."

ON SEAWPM:

"Being in a women's group is special. We work hard on high-level issues, but we also bring small joys and support each other beyond work."

That restraint is not incidental. It is part of what makes long-term accompaniment possible. Because SEAWPM does not need to dominate a process or claim visible ownership of outcomes, it is often able to stay alongside actors over time in ways that more directive or transactional approaches cannot sustain.

Miriam described this as a strategic marathon rather than a sprint. "You have to conceptualise the process as slow and steady. Yes, you can be a catalyst, but you are not the central actor. Some mediators start feeling they are steering the whole process. We are careful not to fall into that trap."

For Prabha Sankaranarayan, this restraint is a mark of professionalism. "A truly effective mediator should walk away with the parties saying, 'Look what we did,' not 'Look what they did for us.' That is the measure of success, and these women embody it."



From (L) to (R): Prabha Sankaranarayan, President and CEO of Mediators Beyond Borders International, speaking at the 2022 Peace Practitioners Research Conference. Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Adelina Kamal with H.E. Michelle Chan, Deputy Secretary of the South and Southeast Asia at the DFAT, during the 2025 Ambassadors' Forum on Peace. Kartika Budhi Wijayanti of ASEAN IPR at the 2024 Ambassadors' Forum on Peace.

Box 2. SEAWPM Terms of Reference in Practice: Value Addition, Principles and Ways of Working

SEAWPM's value addition

SEAWPM is a collaboration of leading Southeast Asian women undertaking mediation, negotiation, and facilitation towards sustainable peace by:



Harnessing collective energies, extensive networks and diverse experiences, while living in and working on conflict



Conducting critical analysis to address the drivers of conflict



Co-creating strategies and mechanisms to transform conflicts



Convening key stakeholders through quiet diplomacy and constructive dialogue



Influencing mediation practice through reflexivity and shared learning

At the heart of SEAWPM's practice is a focus on relationships and connections, and the conviction that women can see each other and uplift the unseen, including the vulnerable and powerless.

Principles and ways of working

SEAWPM's practice is guided by five core principles:



Transformative

Bringing a transformative lens to all spaces, grounded in analysis, conflict sensitivity, strategic engagement, and flexible, creative ways of working.



Listening

Coming to conversations with listening, respect and empathy, acknowledging diverse perspectives, and hearing what is not said.



Trust and Transparency

Building shared understanding, safe spaces, and respectful dialogue through clarity, transparency, and courageous conversations.



Integrity

Upholding an ethical, values-driven practice, including inclusivity, trustworthiness, and accountable stewardship of donor and other resources.



Partnership

Harnessing diverse and complementary energies, experiences, networks, resources and knowledge through reflexivity, agency, and co-constructed learning.

Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator
Lillianne Fan and H.E. Karen Tan, Singaporean
Ambassador during the 2024 Southeast Asian
Women Ambassadors Forum on Peace.



PART III.

Strategic and Political Significance

3.1 Strategic Impact: SEAWPM's Political and Institutional Contribution

SEAWPM's strategic impact lies not only in the dialogues it convenes, but in the political and institutional roles it plays across multiple contexts. Through careful relationship-building and timely political accompaniment, it has become a trusted regional actor.

Over time, SEAWPM's contribution has been recognised at senior regional and international levels, including in ASEAN Chairs' statements, ministerial communiqués, and public acknowledgement by international partners. For those involved, this matters not simply as recognition, but as evidence that relationship-based mediation has real political value. As Shadia put it, "Recognition is important, we've proved that we can do the work, not just talk."

Box 3. Key Strategic Contributions



Trusted informal mechanism

SEAWPM has built credibility and political relevance without relying on a large formal structure.



Regional mediation knowledge

It has helped establish Southeast Asia as a source of mediation experience and practical peacebuilding knowledge.



Bridging formal and informal spaces

SEAWPM connects actors and processes across levels that formal peace mechanisms often keep apart.



Women's leadership in practice

It has helped expand women's roles in mediation, facilitation, and peace diplomacy.



Flexible support for political relevance

Adaptive support has enabled SEAWPM to respond to political realities with discretion and agility.



Long-term trust and accompaniment

Its work shows the value of staying present over time to build trust, continuity, and access.



Stronger networks for peace and diplomacy

It has strengthened exchange and solidarity among women working across diplomacy and peacebuilding.



A broader model of mediation

SEAWPM demonstrates a form of mediation that is relational, adaptive, and politically grounded.



Jularat Damrongviteetham

is a Thai conflict resolution practitioner who has spent more than two decades engaging with the evolving conflict dynamics of Southern Thailand. Her work spans political analysis, strategic advising, and multi-track diplomacy, supporting dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives across government, civil society, and international partners. Within SEAWPM, she brings sharp political insight, a strong grounding in prevention, and a practical understanding of how to create openings before conflict escalates.



ON MEDIATION:

"Every conflict is different, and needs careful judgement about whether to engage, how to engage, and when to step back. It also requires patience, and the discipline not to impose the process."



ON SEAWPM:

"We do not want to be the big men or big women in any conflict. We want to be the mechanism in the engine that helps it move."

A central part of that contribution lies in SEAWPM's ability to connect spaces that are often kept apart: political, diplomatic, and civil society worlds; local realities and regional diplomacy; formal processes and informal relationships. Adelina linked this directly to the platform's relevance, observing that "ASEAN leaders need informal mechanisms like ours to respond to difficult challenges. We do not work only through government channels. We can engage across divides and speak with anyone."

"ASEAN leaders need informal mechanisms like ours to respond to difficult challenges...We can engage across divides and speak with anyone."

Adelina Kamal, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

This bridging role has made SEAWPM an important convener of sensitive political interfaces. Again and again, it has created spaces where people who would not normally meet can engage safely and productively. The Women Leaders Forum on Myanmar is one of the clearest examples. It brought together women leaders from inside Myanmar, the diaspora, and solidarity networks, while also opening channels to regional and international actors. In this sense, SEAWPM's value lies not only in creating dialogue, but in making politically difficult dialogue possible.

Yet SEAWPM's role is not limited to convening. It also serves as a source of strategic interpretation, conflict analysis, and policy support. As Lilianne reflected, governments need "trusted partners and interlocutors who provide objective analysis, respect confidentiality, understand diplomacy, and can bridge the ground level of conflict with the diplomatic sphere." This is part of what gives SEAWPM institutional value. It does not simply open doors; it helps actors read political conditions more clearly and respond more strategically.

Myanmar remains the clearest example of this wider role. SEAWPM has engaged the ASEAN envoy architecture, briefed relevant ministries, and helped create one of the first substantial interfaces between ASEAN-linked diplomacy and a broader spectrum of Myanmar women leaders, resistance actors, and solidarity networks. In a context where regional responses have often been narrow or cautious, it has helped widen the conversation and create space for more inclusive engagement.

Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Jularat Damrongviteetham facilitating Thai Parliamentary Ad-hoc Committee's learning exchange in Bangsamoro, Philippines, in November 2024.



"Our form allows us to be principled and nimble, and to fill gaps that formal mechanisms cannot."

Adelina Kamal, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

At the same time, this contribution is not limited to Myanmar. In Timor-Leste, the Tuban Process created a rare space for dialogue across long-standing divides linked to the violence of 1999. In the Cambodia-Thailand context, SEAWPM facilitated confidential reflection outside increasingly pressured civic environments. In Ambazonia, it accompanied leaders after the Leadership Pact as they navigated a shifting political landscape. In relation to the Rohingya Consultative Council, it supported governance discussions, alliance-building, and the establishment of an office in Cox's Bazar, helping strengthen a more sustainable platform for Rohingya-led political engagement.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that SEAWPM's contribution is both strategic and institutional. The mediators operate as a trusted regional backchannel actor, a source of political advice and analysis, a convener of sensitive interfaces, and a mechanism through which more inclusive forms of peace diplomacy can become possible. As Adelina observed, "Our form allows us to be principled and nimble, and to fill gaps that formal mechanisms cannot."

Case Study 2. Myanmar: Bridging Actors and Shaping Regional Influence

Myanmar has been one of SEAWPM's most significant areas of engagement and one of the clearest examples of its regional influence. Over time, the group has established itself as a trusted actor in ASEAN-linked diplomacy, helping shape regional responses to the crisis, support continuity across chairships, and widen the space for more inclusive engagement.

A central strand of this work has been SEAWPM's close support to ASEAN Special Envoys and Chair processes. During Laos' ASEAN Chairmanship, the mediators regularly briefed the Special Envoy and provided political analysis that informed regional approaches to the crisis. This role expanded during preparations for Malaysia's 2025 Chairmanship, as SEAWPM worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support sustained, informed, and inclusive engagement. The depth of that trust was reflected in Lilianne Fan's appointment as a strategic adviser to the Malaysian ASEAN Office of the Special Envoy.

SEAWPM's contribution has not been limited to advising from the margins. It has also helped sustain continuity between successive chairships, including through a transition roundtable bringing together Myanmar, Malaysian, and Philippine stakeholders, as well as follow-up engagement in Manila. In a context where regional responses often suffer from fragmentation and short political timelines, this work has helped preserve momentum, relationships, and institutional memory.

At the same time, SEAWPM has complemented its regional advisory role by convening rare dialogue among Myanmar stakeholders themselves. The Women Leaders Forum on Myanmar, held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2025, brought together women leaders from inside Myanmar, the diaspora, and solidarity networks, including ethnic, civil society, and political actors who had not previously shared the same room. Jularat captured the immediate need: "They had not met in person for years and were exhausted with Zoom. They asked us to create an in-person meeting space." Adelina underscored the wider significance: "Many young leaders from minorities met key revolutionary leaders for the first time at our forum. This is nation-building in active conflict."

Taken together, this work shows SEAWPM's distinctive bridging role in practice: helping connect ASEAN-linked diplomacy with a broader range of Myanmar actors, while also preserving the trust, continuity, and access needed for more strategic regional engagement over time.

Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators with H.E. Maria Theresa P. Lazaro, Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs and 2026 ASEAN Special Envoy on Myanmar, during a courtesy call in Manila.



3.2 The Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum (2024-2025)

One of the clearest examples of SEAWPM's strategic and institutional contribution is the Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum, developed in collaboration with the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR). More than a diplomatic convening, the Forum shows how SEAWPM helps connect formal institutions with the practice-based knowledge of mediators and peacebuilders.

The Forum emerged from a clear regional gap. Southeast Asian women serve as ambassadors and senior diplomats in complex and conflict-affected settings across the world, yet there had been no dedicated regional space for them to connect, exchange experience, and reflect on their role in peace and security. As Emma put it, "We recognised there were 150 women diplomats from Southeast Asia whose experience and network we were not tapping. What was missing was a space where they could speak not only through official positions, but as individuals."

This idea gained further momentum after SEAWPM and ASEAN-IPR were referenced in ASEAN joint communiqués and leaders' statements as mechanisms relevant to advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Rather than leaving that recognition at the level of symbolism, the two organisations began to consider how it could be translated into practice. As Kartika Budhi Wijayanti of ASEAN-IPR recalled, "The mediators told us they often met women ambassadors in conflict settings who felt underprepared to engage on peace issues. So we started thinking about how to strengthen their capacity."



An interactive session during the 2025 Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum on Peace, creating space for exchange, reflection and shared learning.



A moment of dialogue, reflection, and regional cooperation during the Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

What emerged, however, was more than a training space. The Forum became a setting in which ambassadors, mediators, and peacebuilders could reflect together on preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, and women's leadership in foreign policy and security.

"Some ambassadors started to see that they had a deeper role to play in conflict settings. The achievement is helping people see they can do more than they expected."

Jularat Damrongviteetham, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

The inaugural Forum was convened in Lao PDR in 2024 and included a high-level panel featuring Ibu Retno L. Marsudi and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong. The second followed in Kuala Lumpur in July 2025. Both Forums were co-organised by SEAWPM and ASEAN-IPR in collaboration with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Across both gatherings, women ambassadors, diplomats, mediators, and peacebuilders were brought into conversation about how Southeast Asia could strengthen women's leadership in peace diplomacy, drawing on experience from contexts such as Myanmar, Syria, and Gaza.

Participants spoke warmly of the atmosphere the Forum created. Dr Ambia Perveen, Central Committee Member of the Rohingya Consultative Council, recalled the diversity of the room: "There were people in their seventies, young diplomats, survivors, retired leaders. Different religions, professions, backgrounds, it was beautiful." The significance of the Forum lay not only in who attended, but in the quality of exchange it made possible.

As discussions deepened, Jularat saw participants begin to recognise their own influence in new ways. "Some ambassadors started to see that they had a deeper role to play in conflict settings. The achievement is helping people see they can do more than they expected."

Kartika Budhi Wijayanti pointed to another important outcome: "It gave women ambassadors the rare opportunity to ask difficult questions in a safe space, without the constraints of representing their governments."

Seen in this wider context, the Forum is part of SEAWPM's broader effort to strengthen the conditions for women's leadership in peace and security across the region. By creating a trusted platform for recognition, exchange, and relationship-building among women already working in diplomacy and peacebuilding, it helps expand the ecosystem through which regional peace diplomacy takes shape.

Looking ahead, the Forum is expected to become an annual platform for dialogue and cooperation among Southeast Asian women diplomats. Planning is already underway for the next gathering in the Philippines in 2026, continuing the effort to deepen connections among the region's women ambassadors and strengthen their contribution to peace and security across Southeast Asia and beyond.



Moments of dialogue, solidarity, and leadership from the Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum on Peace 2024-2025.

A moment of solidarity between Nida Shoughry, Co-Director of Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security, and Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Emma Leslie during the Peace Practitioners Research Conference 2025 in Siem Reap.



PART IV.

Global Relevance and Practice Beyond the Region



Lilianne Fan is an anthropologist and humanitarian leader with more than twenty-five years of experience working on armed conflict, displacement, and humanitarian crises across Southeast Asia. She is widely recognised for her expertise on Myanmar, the Rohingya crisis, and ASEAN's role in regional peace and security. In 2025, under Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship, she served as Adviser to the Office of the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, and she is Head of the Secretariat of the Malaysian Advisory Group on Myanmar. Within SEAWPM, Lilianne brings deep regional knowledge, political insight, and a mediation practice grounded in trust, dignity, and long-term relationships.



ON MEDIATION:

"It requires patience, deep fieldwork, relationships and trust. Without trust, mediation is not possible."



ON SEAWPM:

"There is no heroism or ego in this work. Our approach is driven by genuine commitment and shared values."

4.1 From Southeast Asia to the World

From the beginning, the mediators understood that their work would not stop at the boundaries of Southeast Asia. The experience, methods, and political sensibilities they brought from the region resonated with movements and peace processes far beyond it. As Rizki Amalia Affiat, Co-Founder of Intersectional Gender Research Advocacy and Learning (InteGRAL), observed, "Although they are from Southeast Asia, their issues and approaches have global resonance. Coming from post-colonial countries, they understand power imbalances in conflict and war."

SEAWPM does not draw on Southeast Asia's peace process histories simply as background or reference. It actively mobilises them, bringing actors from other conflict settings into conversation with the region's experience of negotiation, democratic transition, post-conflict recovery, and political accommodation. Adelina captured that exchange clearly: "What we bring is experience, and the ability to speak openly in ways governments often cannot." Through this work, she said, SEAWPM brings "Southeast Asia's experience to the world, and the world's experience back to Southeast Asia."

"SEAWPM brings Southeast Asia's experience to the world, and the world's experience back to Southeast Asia."

Adelina Kamal, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

For the mediators, this grounding matters. It is shaped by democracy movements, people power, and hard-won peace agreements, and it travels across contexts in ways that feel both practical and politically legible. As Shadia put it, "We are built by an understanding of democracy and people power. It is like our DNA."

That grounding is matched by practical strengths that partners value in difficult environments. "Several things matter," Lilianne reflected. "Credibility, because each of us has deep respect and trust in our own right; Southeast Asia's rare examples of successful peace processes; and our ability to open doors and show new possibilities." What travels, in other words, is not only experience, but a way of working: relational, politically aware, and rooted in examples that feel relevant rather than abstract.

Those who have worked with the mediators often recognise this immediately. Marc Njoh, a civic leader representing Southern Cameroonians advocating for Ambazonia's independence, recalled how quickly they grasped his movement's challenges. "They had



Netta Leovy and Nida Shoughry, Co-Directors of Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security, at the Peace Practitioners Research Conference 2025 in Siem Reap.

a strong appreciation for context," he said. "They would say, you need to meet this person. Or we dealt with this in East Timor or in Nepal." The mediators connected their movement to places such as Bangsamoro and Aceh, not as fixed models, but as political experiences that could expand the conversation.

In this way, SEAWPM has helped reposition Southeast Asia as a source of mediation knowledge, not merely a recipient of external expertise. The region's experience of insurgency, democratic transition, post-conflict recovery, and negotiated settlement, including in Aceh, Mindanao, Timor-Leste, and Cambodia, has shaped SEAWPM's practice and informed the lessons it brings into wider peacebuilding conversations. As Emma reflected, "People assume that because we are Southeast Asian women we work only on Southeast Asian conflicts. From the start we asked why that must be. This region has knowledge to offer the world."

"Usually, we meet governments in Geneva, Berlin, Washington, Brussels. It was the first time the plane took us east."

Netta Leovy, Co-Director of Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security

For many partners, SEAWPM also represents a shift in how mediation is imagined and where it is led. Instead of reproducing models centred in the West, the mediators offer an approach shaped by lived experience in the Global South. Netta Leovy, Co-Director of Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security, recalled the symbolic force of that shift: "Usually, we meet governments in Geneva, Berlin, Washington, Brussels. It was the first time the plane took us east. That was symbolic."

Yet the symbolism was matched by substance. Ambazonian groups travelled to the Philippines, and Palestinians and Israelis met in Cambodia. Across these encounters, participants repeatedly

described the Southeast Asian-led process as less extractive and more responsive to what they themselves needed. "When Israelis and Palestinians came to the Philippines, the process was not extractive," Emma noted. "We were not interested in taking from them but asking what they needed."

Netta described the contrast even more directly. "In Europe, we often feel like exhibits, guests filling a slot in someone else's theory of change," she said. "But with the Southeast Asian mediators, our needs and our reality were the focus."

For many, it was also the first time they encountered mediation shaped by cultures and histories that felt familiar rather than distant. "As a Palestinian, joining this group felt like finding my way home," said Nida Shoughry. "Eastern and non-Western perspectives are often undervalued. Here, the knowledge felt familiar."

"It is not baked solely in Western thought. They are creative. It is a relief, less paperwork, more human work."

Marc Njoh, Consultative Commission – Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia)

Part of that resonance comes from the mediators' willingness to strip away unnecessary bureaucracy and create space for more human, grounded engagement. As Marc Njoh put it, "It is not baked solely in Western thought. They are creative. It is a relief, less paperwork, more human work."

What SEAWPM offers globally, then, is not only a regional perspective, but a different practice of mediation, one that values accompaniment, practical solidarity, and political learning alongside formal negotiation. After years of frustration with rigid international processes, many partners found this approach transformative. As Netta reflected, "After so many disappointments from the West, this partnership stands out. They bring tools, listening and real partnership." Sometimes, she added, "through their listening, we even hear ourselves more clearly. That is invaluable."

Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security, Netta Loevy at the Peace Practitioners Research Conference 2022 in Siem Reap, Cambodia.



Case Study 3. Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia): Learning through Southeast Asia

In April 2025, leaders from most major Ambazonian liberation movements signed a unified Leadership Pact in Accra, ending more than six years of internal fragmentation and failed mediation attempts. The breakthrough followed sustained engagement by SEAWPM, particularly Shadia Marhaban and Emma Leslie, working with Mediators Beyond Borders International.

The process began quietly during the pandemic through online dialogue. “Emma and I spent almost a year on Zoom with them,” Shadia recalled. “We listened. That year built trust.”

As relationships deepened, SEAWPM facilitated learning exchanges in Cambodia and later in the Philippines, where Ambazonian leaders reflected on conflict, peace processes, and movement strategy. These visits did more than offer solidarity. They gave participants first-hand exposure to Southeast Asian societies that had moved from armed conflict towards more durable political settlement.

For Marc Njoh, a civic leader representing Southern Cameroonians advocating for Ambazonia’s independence, the experience was transformative. “To physically go to a territory that has been through conflict, that has signed a comprehensive peace agreement and is now living its outcome, that was different,” he said. “It really changed how we think about our own liberation movement.”

By early 2024, the Ambazonia Consultative Commission had formally sought SEAWPM’s support to strengthen internal cohesion, improve movement structures, and prepare for possible engagement with Cameroon. Follow-up convenings in Ghana and Amsterdam helped sharpen strategy and build momentum.

The result was not simply better dialogue, but a concrete political achievement: a unity pact signed after years of division. As Marc reflected, “They care deeply about human suffering and justice for people. When you bring that together with our determination, it is invaluable.”



A strategic meeting during the Leadership Meeting of the Consultative Commission – Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia) in the Philippines, co-facilitated by SEAWPM and MBBI.

4.2 Beyond Gender in Mediation

The global relevance of SEAWPM's practice is closely tied to another defining feature of the group: all its mediators are women. Yet while gender shapes their perspective, it does not confine their contribution. What drives their work is not identity alone, but urgency, experience, credibility, and skill. At the same time, the mediators are acutely aware that women have long been central to peace efforts while remaining marginal to formal peace processes, often recognised as supporters of peace but not as political actors in their own right.

Nikki Singer of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia captures that dilemma directly: "Too often, when we label someone a 'woman mediator' or 'woman negotiator,' she gets relegated to 'women's issues.'" For many members, this is precisely the risk. The label can create visibility, but it can also constrain how women's authority is understood. Jularat speaks to that frustration clearly: "I do not want to be labelled only as a woman mediator. I want to be seen as someone who understands politics and can speak with strong opinions."

What emerges from SEAWPM is not a rejection of gender, but a refusal to be confined by it. Its significance lies not simply in the fact that its members are women, but in the way their practice has expanded what women's participation in mediation can mean. As Emma put it, "It is not only about being women; it is about having a space where we can actually impact conflict." That distinction matters. SEAWPM's contribution has not been limited to calling for women's inclusion as observers or beneficiaries. Rather, its members have helped create space for women as agenda-shapers, intermediaries, facilitators, advisers, and political actors with influence over process and outcomes.

Tecla captures the tension between women's longstanding labour in conflict settings and the way that labour is still undervalued in formal peace work: "People sometimes underestimate us because we are a group of women. But women have always been on the frontlines in conflict, supporting families, communities, and people directly involved in the conflict, yet our role in mediation and peacebuilding is still under-recognised."



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Z Nang Raw speaks during the WPS Week side event, Peace by Piece: Addressing Conflict- Related Sexual Violence throughout the Peace Continuum, co-hosted with Australia to the United Nations in October 2025.

“Women have always been on the frontlines in conflict... yet our role in mediation and peacebuilding is still under-recognised.”

Leonésia Tecla da Silva, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

Seen in this light, SEAWPM is not simply making women visible in mediation. It is helping to normalise women’s authority within it. As Lilianne argues, “Women need to be part of discussions at every level, from local governance to national, regional, and international processes. Whether the issue is political negotiations, settlements, accountability, or the impact on their lives, their presence must be normal, expected, and meaningful.”

Members describe this as part of a broader shift in mediation culture. Reflecting on the field she encountered early on, Shadia said: “Many mediators I met early on were men, white European men in suits. But time and conflict have changed. Women are not there for the limelight. We are there to help sort out conflicts, and we listen more.” That emphasis on listening returns across the testimonies, not as a soft skill or moral virtue, but as a political method. As Jularat explained, “We hear what others might miss. We sense pain in subtle ways. If you want lasting solutions, you must include women, not just as a number, but by bringing their voices and perspectives into the process.”

Still, SEAWPM members are careful not to let these insights harden into another form of reduction. Adelina makes that point explicitly: “Our work is not only about gender. But it is about equity and bringing the right experience and representation to negotiate access and outcomes. We just happen to be women.”

“If you want lasting solutions, you must include women, not just as a number, but by bringing their voices and perspectives into the process.”

Jularat Damrongviteetham, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

SEAWPM’s practice therefore suggests a wider rethinking of mediation itself, one that values listening, adaptive strategy, and the ability to work across formal and informal levels, rather than relying only on elite access or official authority. Shadia describes this clearly: “We are there to help, to work through conflict, and above all to listen. I think listening is something many mediators still do not fully recognise as central. What makes our position at SEAWPM special, and perhaps unique, is precisely that power of listening.”

For Rizki Amalia Affiat, the strength of the network lies partly in the way it holds this tension without needing to resolve it into a slogan: “Members bring diverse identities, experiences and roles. They do not erase gender, but they do not have to announce it either. I respect that strategy.”

From the donor side, this is also recognised as part of SEAWPM’s distinctiveness. Ashley Banister of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade observed, “SEAWPM brings a uniquely intersectional and locally grounded approach to peacebuilding. They challenge patriarchal norms quietly and respectfully by positioning women as leaders and experts, not just beneficiaries or observers.”

Case Study 4. Israel and Palestine: A Non-Extractive Mediation Process

In 2024, SEAWPM began working with a group of Israeli and Palestinian women peacebuilders from Itach Ma'aki who had collaborated online for years but had never been able to meet safely in person. In a context where even direct contact across divides is politically charged, SEAWPM spent time building trust with the group and helping make an in-person mediation process possible.

In February 2025, those plans became a reality when SEAWPM hosted a workshop for the group in the Philippines. Drawing on political lessons from Bangsamoro and Timor-Leste, the workshop offered practical insight into how local leadership, patience, and sustained engagement can keep dialogue alive in deeply divided settings.

For many participants, the gathering marked a breakthrough. Nida Shoughry, Palestinian Co-Director of the Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security recalled: "For nearly four years we had been working together, but we could not break through. When the mediators reached out and said, 'Come to the Philippines,' it felt like a lifeline."

What participants encountered in Manila, and later in a subsequent workshop in Cambodia, was a process that put their needs and work at the centre. Netta Loevy contrasted this with more extractive international settings: "In Europe, we often feel like exhibits. With the Southeast Asian mediators, we felt like the purpose. Our needs, our networks, our work came first."

The result was a level of honesty and connection that had previously been difficult to achieve. Participants left with renewed momentum, stronger relationships, and a sharper sense of shared purpose. As Nida later reflected, "For the first time in a long time, I feel real hope."



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators Miriam Coronel Ferrer and Leonesia Tecla Da Silva with the women peacebuilders from across Israel and Palestine in the Philippines, where a non-extractive process created space for listening, connection and continued dialogue.

Taken together, these perspectives show that gender matters in SEAWPM, but not in a simplistic or tokenistic sense. Rather than serving as a label alone, it becomes part of a wider practice that expands political space, shifts expectations, and broadens understanding of what mediation leadership can look like.

4.3 Funding for Political Relevance

SEAWPM's approach has always depended on more than who is in the room or which conflicts it engages. It has also depended on how the work is held, supported, and funded. From the beginning, there was a deliberate decision not to build a heavy organisation first and only then begin the work. As Nikki Singer recalls, the question was simple: "Do we spend the next three to five years trying to build an organisation, or do we get on with the mediation work?" That choice shaped the network from the outset. The aim was never to create bureaucracy for its own sake, but to build only enough structure to support the political work itself. As Nikki put it, "We believe the organisation exists to serve the work, not the other way around."

"We believe the organisation exists to serve the work, not the other way around."

Nikki Singer, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies Cambodia

That choice also shaped the kind of support SEAWPM required. Instead of building a formal organisation from scratch, it has relied on light institutional hosting that enabled the mediators to concentrate on substantive peace work. The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia and InteGRAL in Indonesia played this role by managing funding, administration, and logistics. As Rizki Amalia Affiat of InteGRAL explained, "They already had work in Cambodia and needed an organisation in Indonesia to host funding and manage administrative and logistics matters."



Nikki Singer, Executive Director, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the 2024 Women Ambassadors' Forum on Peace.



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Lilianne Fan joins a high-level panel in Canberra to mark 25 years of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and reflect on the role of women in shaping peace, security and inclusive societies.

This arrangement also gave SEAWPM room to move. As Nikki Singer of CPCS explained, “The trade-off meant the members could get busy with mediation rather than spending years setting up an organisation and managing all of that.”

Rather than investing its energy in institutional expansion, SEAWPM prioritised relationships, access, and responsiveness. That has been crucial, because its work does not unfold according to a tidy project timetable. Its contribution depends on being able to respond when openings emerge, to move quietly in sensitive contexts, and to remain present over time. As Ashley Banister of DFAT observes, “SEAWPM’s success relies on their ability to respond creatively and quickly to emerging opportunities for mediation and facilitation. This requires secure, long-term, flexible core funding.”

Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been central to making this possible, providing not only core funding but the kind of genuine trust and adaptive support that allows SEAWPM to respond when it matters most. That relationship built on shared values and mutual accountability has been quietly foundational to everything SEAWPM has been able to achieve.

Flexibility, in turn, is closely tied to discretion. Kartika Budhi Wijayanti notes that SEAWPM is “not bound by an intergovernmental framework, which gives them flexibility to be present in many spaces.” That freedom to move between formal and informal arenas, to remain quiet where necessary, and to engage without drawing attention too early is one of the platform’s clearest advantages. It is also something that can easily be narrowed by rigid funding structures that demand fixed outputs, predetermined activities, or visibility at the wrong moment.

“It is really about being there in solidarity with communities and with governments and helping people through very difficult political situations.”

Lilianne Fan, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

This kind of flexibility supports not only responsiveness in moments of crisis, but also the slower, less visible work that mediation depends on. Some of the most important work happens long before outcomes can be shown: maintaining relationships, carrying political analysis, staying present through uncertainty, and waiting for the right opening. As Lilianne puts it, “It can take years to understand the issues, build trust, and really grasp the political nuances. Mediation has to be grounded in deep understanding and deep relationships.”

That is why, for the mediators themselves, funding is not an abstract management issue. It is part of what makes meaningful engagement possible. As Lilianne reflects, “We are not there to bring in a lot of funds, run a project, and tell donors that we have succeeded. It is really about being there in solidarity with communities and with governments and helping people through very difficult political situations.” SEAWPM’s value lies not in delivering visible activities for their own sake, but in sustaining the kind of political accompaniment that difficult contexts require.

SEAWPM’s experience points to a broader lesson for the mediation field. Funding peace work effectively often means backing trusted people, relationships, and institutional lightness, not only predefined activities. Politically meaningful mediation does not necessarily require large budgets or elaborate delivery structures. Often, what matters most is a small number of trusted people, modest support systems, and the freedom to act when timing matters. Shadia expresses this with characteristic practicality: “Mediation does not always need big funds. We do not need to meet in five-star hotels. We can do it in a small hotel. We can do it in huts in Africa.”

“Regional women mediators’ networks... create a multiplier effect. The return on investment is not just in outcomes, but in the regional resilience and leadership these networks foster.”

Ashley Banister, Women, Peace and Security Advisor, DFAT Gender Equality Branch

Seen in this light, SEAWPM offers a wider lesson not only for donors, but for the mediation field itself. Enabling structures matter. Modest hosting and administrative support can have disproportionate strategic value when they allow trusted mediators to remain focused on substantive work. In SEAWPM’s case, flexible, low-overhead support has helped them remain discreet, responsive, and politically relevant in contexts where a more rigid project structure would likely have reduced both access and effectiveness.

But the implications go beyond SEAWPM alone. Networks like this do more than deliver activities. They build relationships, sustain analysis, widen access, and strengthen the region’s ability to respond to conflict over time. Ashley Banister captures that wider significance: “Regional women mediators’ networks are worth investing in because they create a multiplier effect. The return on investment is not just in outcomes, but in the regional resilience and leadership these networks foster.”

Case Study 5. Afghanistan: Regional Lessons, New Contexts

SEAWPM's work on Afghanistan has centred on sustaining dialogue among Afghan stakeholders from different political perspectives through the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum (AFTF). In a highly contested environment, its contribution has been both practical and political: helping maintain continuity, support constructive exchange, and connect Afghan actors with regional experience that feels grounded, credible, and culturally resonant.

A key part of this role lay in SEAWPM's ability to engage across difference. Its understanding of Islamic governance and the significance of Islamic values in public and political life gave it credibility with a wide range of Afghan stakeholders and allowed it to bring fresh perspectives into the forum's discussions. This included support to two major AFTF meetings in 2023, including a Jakarta gathering that members described as the Forum's most productive and impactful meeting.

SEAWPM's contribution went beyond convening. Through regular engagement with AFTF members, as well as with the European Union Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Australia's Special Representative on Afghanistan, it helped sustain channels for analysis, communication, and strategic reflection on the conflict. It also contributed to policy recommendations for the interim authorities in Kabul and the international community on how Afghan concerns might be addressed in more inclusive and sustainable ways.



Then Indonesian Foreign Minister H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi in conversation with participants during the Afghanistan Future Thought Forum in Jakarta, August 2023.

This work was reinforced by direct engagement in Afghanistan. An assessment visit to Kabul helped deepen relationships with partners and sharpen understanding of the situation on the ground, while also opening further entry points for dialogue. Those relationships later supported learning exchanges for Afghan civil society members in Jakarta, creating space to reflect on governance and education models from Southeast Asia that might inform Afghanistan's future recovery.

As Adelina Kamal recalled, some of the most resonant lessons drew on shared Muslim experience: "We brought Afghan men to Aceh to show that girls can attend school under Sharia. Our Foreign Minister, a Muslim grandmother, told them, 'I am a woman and a minister.' That was a powerful message."

Across this work, SEAWPM helped sustain dialogue while making regional learning transferable, showing how Southeast Asian experience, particularly from Muslim-majority societies such as Aceh and Malaysia, can speak to Afghan debates in grounded and politically resonant ways.



Banda Aceh Mayor Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, welcoming the Delegation during the Afghanistan Civil Society Exchange hosted by SEAWPM.

Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators gathered to reflect on their work, reconnect with their guiding principles, and strengthen their strategies for 2026.



PART V. **Reflection and Future Direction**



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators in a working session, mapping out strategies, possibilities, and resilient capacities.

5.1 Opening Doors to Peace: Five-Year Reflection

In just five years, the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators have widened where peace conversations can take place, who can lead them, and how dialogue itself can be shaped. Nikki Singer captured the breadth of this work: "They have created unexpected and imaginative pathways for dialogue, bringing people from Ambazonia to Cambodia and the Philippines, and bringing women from Gaza to Southeast Asia to connect and gain perspective. They have often delivered what others thought impossible."

Adelina pointed to the breadth of that reach. "We have proved that we can talk to anyone, from prime ministers to Timorese housewives who are descendants of militias. We have facilitated reconciliation between resistance fighters and those who once fought against them. That is mediation too."

"We are part of a group that is experimenting, making women visible and changing practice. And it means we are never alone. The sum is bigger than the parts."

Miriam Coronel Ferrer, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

For the mediators themselves, SEAWPM has become more than a platform. It has become a professional home, a source of solidarity, and a place of shared experimentation. "We are not solo practitioners anymore," said Miriam. "We are part of a group that is experimenting, making women visible and changing practice. And it means we are never alone. The sum is bigger than the parts."

Lilianne described that value in deeply personal terms: "It has been a sisterhood. Coming from male-dominated spaces, having this group has been invaluable. We can debate, cry, support each other, and strategise. It is deeply rewarding."

Throughout this journey, the presence of Ibu Retno L. Marsudi has remained a steady thread. "Even now, I can text her and say, 'We're doing something,' and she replies that she's proud and tells us to keep going," said Emma.

Across regions, SEAWPM's impact is felt not only through the mediators' expertise, but through the way they practise mediation: grounded, relational, and shaped by lived experience. "They changed the way Netta and I work," said Nida Shoughry. "They touched the lives of every woman they met. What keeps us connected to them is not only hope, but their conviction that peace is possible."

"They touched the lives of every woman they met. What keeps us connected to them is not only hope, but their conviction that peace is possible."

Nida Shoughry, Palestinian Co-Director of the Itach Ma'aki's Centre for Women, Peace and Security

Their contribution has not only made women more visible in peace processes but has also helped normalise women's authority as mediators and political actors. From within ASEAN institutions, that contribution is increasingly recognised as a living expression of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. "They often say they don't do WPS," said Kartika Budhi Wijayanti. "But they embody it. They are women mediators and negotiators in practice."

For funding partners, the significance is both immediate and longer-term. "In just five years, they've built a regionally rooted platform shaping policy and practice," said Ashley Banister. "Its importance lies in what it has achieved, and, in the space, it has created for future generations." As H.E. Tiffany McDonald, Australia's Ambassador to ASEAN reflects, SEAWPM's "unique experiences and deep connection to communities in the region amplify women's voices and leadership in preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding, complementing ASEAN-Australia shared efforts to shape a peaceful, stable and prosperous region."

"The Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators are one of the best avenues we have to address what we are facing today."

Adhyanti Sardanarini Wirajuda, Director for ASEAN Economic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia

For those who have worked alongside them, SEAWPM represents a continuing source of hope. "Conflicts will not end. More will appear," said Adhyanti Sardanarini Wirajuda. "The Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators are one of the best avenues we have to address what we are facing today."

H.E. Tiffany McDonald, Australia's Ambassador to ASEAN during an interactive session at the Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors' Forum on Peace 2025.



Case Study 6. Rohingya: Accompaniment and Political Positioning in Regional Processes

SEAWPM's engagement with the Rohingya has centred on advancing Rohingya-led political representation within an increasingly complex regional and geopolitical landscape, where Rohingya actors continue to be marginalised or confined to humanitarian narratives. Rather than treating the Rohingya issue solely as one of protection and assistance, SEAWPM has focused on strengthening the Rohingya as a political constituency with legitimate stakes in Myanmar's future and in regional diplomatic processes.

A central vehicle for this work has been the Rohingya Consultative Council (RCC), which SEAWPM supported from its early formation through to its consolidation as an emerging political platform. This included helping RCC establish an operational presence in Cox's Bazar, strengthening their internal governance and consultation mechanisms, and supporting the RCC in building coherence across diverse Rohingya constituencies. Critically, SEAWPM's support has also enabled the RCC to move beyond internal organisation toward more alliance building and strategic external engagement.

A key dimension of this has been positioning the RCC within ASEAN-related processes on Myanmar. SEAWPM supported the RCC in developing the political analysis, diplomatic language, and strategic relationships necessary to engage with ASEAN interlocutors, including in the context of evolving discussions around Myanmar's political future, elections, and the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus. This has included preparing the RCC to engage more effectively with ASEAN Member States, track intra-ASEAN dynamics, and identify entry points for influence—particularly in moments of regional transition.



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Lilianne Fan with members of the Rohingya women community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh — a meeting grounded in listening, solidarity, and the lived realities of women navigating displacement.

As Jaivet Ealom, Secretary-General of the RCC, reflected, “The most significant impact has been our ability to navigate the regional and domestic political landscape more effectively. The support we received from SEAWPM was vital in deepening our understanding of, and engagement with, ASEAN and other multilateral processes, as well as helping us manage relationships with complex Myanmar stakeholders.” In this sense, SEAWPM’s contribution was not only organisational, but political: helping the RCC strengthen its footing, sharpen its analysis, and engage more confidently across complex regional processes.

SEAWPM’s accompaniment has also extended into quiet regional diplomacy, including engagement with ASEAN member states and key ministries to build recognition of the RCC as a legitimate interlocutor. Across these efforts, SEAWPM’s role has been explicitly political: supporting the RCC to sharpen its positioning, strengthen its credibility, and operate more effectively within ASEAN–Myanmar interfaces. The result is not only greater visibility for Rohingya actors, but a more structured and strategic presence in the regional processes that will shape Myanmar’s future.



Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator Z Nang Raw and Dr Ambia Perveen, Central Committee Member of the Rohingya Consultative Council, at the Southeast Asian Women Ambassadors’ Forum on Peace 2025, facilitated by SEAWPM mediator Lilianne Fan.

5.2 The Work Still Ahead: Rethinking Mediation for a Changing World

The challenges ahead are immense. Environmental crisis, geopolitical fragmentation, and shrinking civic space are deepening instability across the region and beyond. Yet the mediators speak not only of risk, but of responsibility. Their reflections are marked by urgency, but also by a clear conviction that mediation must keep evolving if it is to remain equal to the world it now confronts.

For Shadia, that future begins with renewal and transmission. “My hope is that we can build a charter and prepare younger mediators. Some of us are already in our sixties. We need to pass on knowledge with humility.”

“We must move past big man mediation. The models we need now are feminist, relational, and grounded in addressing power.”

Emma Leslie, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

That sense of inheritance is matched by a continued insistence on where mediation must remain grounded. “We need to centre the voices of women directly affected by conflict, displaced, stateless, surviving genocide,” Lilianne says.

For Emma, the challenge is not simply to bring women further into existing models, but to move beyond those models altogether. “We must move past big man mediation. The models we need now are feminist, relational, and grounded in addressing power.”

Miriam, meanwhile, sees Southeast Asia’s own histories as part of what the future still demands. “We bring both credibility and imagination to spaces that are polarised. We come from a region that has navigated insurgency, transitions, ceasefires that held and ceasefires that collapsed. Those lessons matter far beyond Southeast Asia.”

Together, these reflections point toward a mediation practice that is more grounded, more adaptive, and more willing to challenge inherited assumptions about who leads, whose knowledge counts, and what kind of political work peace processes require.

For Adelina, that commitment remains both political and deeply personal. “Two things weigh heavily on me: the planetary crisis and the collapse of the global order. But even in this chaos, persistence matters.” Her words speak to a shared ethic that runs quietly but firmly through SEAWPM’s work: a belief that even in periods of uncertainty, fracture, and loss, there is meaning in staying present, continuing to accompany, and refusing withdrawal.

“Do what you can and do it with consistency and conscience.”

Adelina Kamal, Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediator

That may be one of the deepest lessons of these five years. Not that the path ahead is clear, or that mediation can resolve every rupture, but that there is political meaning in staying present, continuing to accompany, and refusing withdrawal. As Adelina puts it, “Do what you can and do it with consistency and conscience.”



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