



PEACE IN OUR CITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Meeting Summary

August 26, 2025
Quezon City, Philippines

peace
IN OUR CITIES

INTRODUCTION

On August 26, 2025, Peace in Our Cities had its first workshop in the Southeast Asia region in Quezon City, Philippines. Local leaders from across the Philippines came together to talk about urban violence prevention, what challenges they have been facing in their cities and provinces, and where there is opportunity for action. This workshop was organized in partnership with Bayi, Inc. and the Red Dot Foundation, and it was hosted by Quezon City's Gender and Development Council. It was also supported by the University of the Philippines Center for Women's and Gender Studies and The Asia Foundation.

OPENING REMARKS

The workshop started with welcome remarks from Mayor Joy Belmonte, from Quezon City. Mayor Joy emphasized the importance of inclusive governance in a diverse and populous city, linking it directly to public safety. She also highlighted some of Quezon City's initiatives, including a centralized gender-based violence database, protection centers, and a 24/7 hotline. She stressed that peacebuilding must place women and marginalized communities at the center, calling for collaboration, mutual support, and shared solutions.

Rachel Locke, PiOC co-founder, also offered welcome remarks. She defined peace as not only the absence of violence but ensuring dignity, freedom, and opportunity for all. She noted that violence manifests in different ways depending on local context, and highlighted the importance of ensuring that marginalized voices shape definitions, data, and policies regarding safety and peace in cities. She closed her remarks reaffirming PiOC's commitment to solidarity, innovation, and supporting local actors across cities.

Kat Tolosa, Director for Governance and Resilience at The Asia Foundation, shared a solidarity message with the group. She stressed that local governments are the frontline of peacebuilding, where politics meets public needs, and that they need to build institutions that withstand pressure without excluding communities.

She emphasized that peace is secured through small, consistent, and difficult decisions at the local level, and reaffirmed The Asia Foundation's commitment to partnerships, grounded collaboration, and support for local leaders.

Closing the introductions, **Maya Tamayo, Bay, Inc's Co-Executive Director**, offered framing remarks to center the workshop around a feminist peacebuilding lens. She introduced BAYI's "7 Cs of Feminist Governance" (critical, contextual, connected, consultative, caring, collective, creative), and argued that peacebuilding must be feminist—addressing unequal power relations and centering women and marginalized groups. She stressed that true peace requires justice, care, and transformation of systems that sustain inequality, and called for collective and courageous solutions that prioritize justice over domination or fear.

PRESENTATIONS

The presentations started with an **overview of PiOC by Rachel Locke and Luisa Portugal (PiOC Secretariat member)**. Peace in Our Cities is a global, member-driven network, focused on reducing urban violence through collaboration between local governments, civil society and international organizations. PiOC organizes its work around "3 As:"

- Amplify the scale and solutions of the urban violence problem.
- Advance evidence of what works to reduce urban violence.
- Accompany local experts and city leaders in their violence reduction priorities.



Following the overview, **Rachel Locke and Dr. Jean Franco, from the University of the Philippines, spoke on the topic of violence against women in politics (VAWP).** They noted that global trends show persistent levels of VAWP, especially in Asia-Pacific and Latin America, with personal, community-wide, and institutional impacts. Specifically, for the Philippine context, Dr. Franco highlighted systemic underrepresentation of women, widespread misogyny, and disinformation as contributing factors for this type of violence. She called for a distinct legal framework, alongside electoral and party reforms, to ensure the safety of women in politics.

Afterwards, **Rachel Locke made a presentation on the impacts of repression-oriented law enforcement.** She warned against “tough-on-crime” and militarized approaches, which alienate communities, harm democracy, and perpetuate trauma. She also highlighted that prisons and repressive enforcement often cause intergenerational trauma and reinforce inequality, and shared examples from PiOC cities on alternative approaches to combat crime and ensure the safety of its residents, such as the [Pelota’s \(Brazil\) Pact for Peace](#) and [Oakland’s \(US\) Ceasefire](#).

Luisa Portugal then spoke on the opportunities and ethical boundaries of data & artificial intelligence (AI) for violence prevention. She started by noting that violence is concentrated: 50 percent of crimes occur on 4.5 percent of streets, underscoring the importance of hyper-local data. She offered a framework for using data and AI in cities:



- Perform (including informing policy decisions and monitoring progress).
- Reflect (evaluate results and learning lessons).
- Prepare (understand the problem and anticipate situations).

She concluded by emphasizing the need for ethical safeguards and human oversight and noted the importance of not letting data overshadow community communications.

ElsaMarie DSilva, founder and director of the Red Dot Foundation, offered the final presentation of the day. She introduced the SafeCity app, a crowdsourced platform to anonymously report harassment and violence, revealing hidden patterns, and shared examples from India, Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines, and New York, showing data-driven prevention and systemic change. She concluded by noting that violence is preventable, especially in public spaces, but it requires intention and investment, and made a call to action to engage youth, men and design better solutions together.



OPEN DISCUSSION

After the presentations, participants, including the many elected leaders present, engaged in an open discussion where they reflected on the topics presented. The discussion centered around challenges being faced in communities in regard to urban violence, how leaders are addressing these challenges, and where they most need support. Their comments touched on the topics below:

- **Alcohol-related violence and strategies to implement responsible drinking interventions.** One participant noted that a lot of the violence that their community experiences is not pre-meditated, but it mostly happens in social situations where alcohol is involved. As well as a discussion of measures that can be implemented to regulate alcohol consumption—a strategy that has had success in some cities around the world—this conversation led to a discussion on the importance and effectiveness of providing mental health support to people involved in violent behavior or at high-risk of engaging with it.
- Several participants also highlighted the **relative high levels of violence against women in their communities, mainly related to sexual violence and VAWP.** A few participants shared testimonies of threats and harassment that they received during their campaigning period. They also discussed some of the legal ordinances to address sexual violence,

including the Republic Act 8353 (the Anti-Rape Law), which significantly expanded the definition of rape and classified it as a crime against persons.

- Participants reflected on the discussion about **overreliance on repressive measures for violence prevention.** One participant mentioned a recent example in which they regretted initially seeking a heavy-handed approach to deal with a situation, concluding that a peace instilled by fear is not sustainable and defeats its purpose. The ability to be honest about shifts in attitude and policy was a highlight of having a relatively small group and a foundation of openness and honesty to the workshop.
- Participants also talked about the **importance of prioritizing community engagement, particularly youth, women, and marginalized groups, in policy design and implementation.** They noted that beyond gender-based violence, there also needs to be provisions for violence against the LGBTQ+ population and other marginalized sectors.

In the closing comments, several participants expressed interest in the PiOC network and noted that they were particularly interested in having support for implementing inclusive, data-driven, and context-specific violence prevention strategies, and also the opportunity of engaging in cross-city learning and exchanges.



Participants of the first PiOC Asia-Pacific regional meeting.



About Peace in Our Cities

Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) is a unique global network of 24 cities and over 40 community-based and international partners with the ambitious goal to halve urban violence by 2030. The network represents over 25 million people in cities across the world.

PiOC seeks to reduce and prevent urban violence world-wide—preserving lives and helping cities thrive. It does so by creating concrete, participatory, and evidence-based platform exchanges to reduce and prevent severe violence in member cities, while also building a global movement of urban-violence-reduction advocates. The PiOC approach is based on three lines of action:

- Amplify policymaker awareness of the genuine scope and scale of urban violence and opportunities available to help cities address it.
- Advance evidence-informed, balanced policy solutions and peacebuilding approaches to reduce the most severe forms of violence in urban contexts.
- Accompany city leaders, community partners, and civil society through peer exchanges and information access to realize ambitious targets for violence reduction.

Peace in Our Cities is co-facilitated by three US-based independent institutions: the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies at New York University's Center on International Cooperation; the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego; and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security. For more, visit: peaceinourcities.org.

All photos courtesy of Bayi, Inc.