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## Tanenbaum Names New *Peacemaker in Action*

Unknown Peace Actor Who Risks Everything is Recognized

**New York, New York** – Tanenbaum today announces its 2015 *Peacemakers in Action* Award recipient, Maria Ida “Deng” Giguiento, a devout Catholic from the Philippines. Ms. Giguiento – or Deng as she is widely known – deserves this global recognition for her work as a faith-driven peace activist in the Philippines’ Mindanao region and in Timor-Leste, where she has mediated conflicts between each country’s governments and rebels. Although she has been menaced for pursuing her work, she perseveres, deeply motivated by faith and her vision that a peaceful future is possible.

“Deng is doing the hard, dirty, grassroots work that tackles violent conflict and discrimination head on,” says Joyce Dubensky, Tanenbaum CEO. “But most people have never heard of her. In these times of escalating violence and extremism, we are proud to recognize and support her quiet heroism. She gives me hope that peace is more than a nice word. She proves it can be achieved, one step at a time.”

For more than 20 years, Deng has worked on the ground in the Mindanao conflict, creating alliances among conflicting Christian, Muslim and indigenous groups. Truly a grassroots peace activist, Deng learned the indigenous Maguindanao dialect from women by shucking corn alongside them, from which her hand still bears a scar. As former Director of Notre Dame University’s Peace Education Center in Cotabato City, she developed programs, facilitated interfaith dialogue workshops with religious leaders, debunked stereotypes as she raised awareness about Muslim victims of conflict and helped civil society develop their agenda for peace. That agenda was included in the 1996 final peace agreement accord between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MILF).

Beyond the Philippines, Deng’s impact is still felt in Timor-Leste. As East Timor sought independence from Indonesia in 1999, Deng was behind the scenes helping to bring East Timorese and Indonesian leaders together through her work at Catholic Relief Services. As an aide to Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo of Dili when the United Nations called for the referendum that would lead to independence, it was Deng, who was fluent in the East Timorese language Tetum, who organized hundreds of youth leaders, teachers and religious leaders and



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taught them how to monitor and prepare for the referendum. When that historic day arrived, Deng was there. She witnessed community elders wearing their finest clothing – traditionally worn in preparation for death. The elders later confided that they expected to die for participating, but they felt compelled to vote because their dream of independence for their grandchildren could no longer be stifled.<sup>i</sup>

Today, Deng is the Training Coordinator for Peacebuilding at Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in the Philippines, where violence continues to erupt and peace remains fragile. She also serves as one of the core Facilitators at the Grassroots Peacebuilding Learning Institute (GPLC) where she trains youth, village elders and leaders from different religions and sectors of society. Deng also serves as one of the core Facilitators at the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) where she co-facilitates in training peace educators, peace practitioners, and key stakeholders in peace processes from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Deng and her fellow 2015 awardee Sheikh Al-Marwani of Yemen join 28 other [Peacemakers](#) in 22 conflict zones who form the unique *Peacemakers in Action Network*. Through the *Network*, facilitated by Tanenbaum, these peacebuilders inspire each other and share expertise.

“Maria Ida ‘Deng’ Giguiento is an outstanding new member of our *Peacemakers in Action Network*,” Dubensky said. “She has tremendous experience and spirit. Working with her, and learning from her, I know that our *Peacemakers Network* will be stronger and more adaptable as it confronts global conflicts and the escalation of violent extremism that is a shared concern across the world.”

To be named a *Peacemaker in Action*, nominees must meet five criteria: be religiously-motivated, have worked in an area of armed conflict, have risked their lives or freedom, include locally based work in their efforts, and be relatively unknown.

To learn more about this year’s *Peacemakers* visit: <https://tanenbaum.org/peacemakers-in-action-network/2015-awardees-finalists/>

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*Tanenbaum is a secular, non-sectarian not-for-profit committed to combatting religious strife in conflict and post-conflict zones. Supported by Tanenbaum, faith-driven peace activists from around the world reduce violence and build cultures that reject extremism. As a result of Tanenbaum and its peace builders, peace interventions have taken place in Syria, Sri Lanka and other stressed regions.*

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0506950.htm>