

# THE INITIATIVE FOR INCLUSIVE SECURITY

## MEDIA ADVISORY

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## Women's Rights in Democratic Muslim Countries: "Like Canaries in a Coalmine"

WASHINGTON — Following her keynote address on how Islam can neutralize extremism and democratize Muslim nations at the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy's eighth annual conference on April 27, **Amina Rasul-Bernardo, lead convener of the Philippines Council for Islam and Democracy**, will be available to comment on the Islamic insurgency in the Philippines (including the recent beheadings in her home district of seven hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf) and the vital role of women in conflict resolution. "Women's rights in democratizing or democratic Muslim societies are like canaries in a coalmine," said Ms. Rasul-Bernardo. "If the canaries are safe, so is the coalmine. Thus if women's rights are strong, so is the society." **An expert on issues relating to minority representation and democratic participation in the Philippines—particularly as relates to the Muslim insurgency in Mindanao**—Ms. Rasul-Bernardo is a senior research fellow with the Sycip Policy Center at the Asian Institute of Management in the Philippines.

*To arrange an interview with Ms. Rasul-Bernardo, please contact Mark Russell at 617-995-1920 or by email at [Mark\\_Russell@huntalternatives.org](mailto:Mark_Russell@huntalternatives.org).*

Drawing on personal experience and extensive fieldwork, Ms. Rasul-Bernardo can comment on issues of security, terrorism, and democracy as the Philippines prepares for congressional and local elections on May 14. "Genuine democracy, which will provide more space for the marginalized – like Muslim women – will be able to temper the inclination toward extremist activities," said **Ms. Rasul-Bernardo** in her keynote address at Friday's conference, *The Rights of Women in Islam and Muslim Societies*. "For marginalized minority Muslim communities in the Philippines, democratization is at odds with the state's priority on peace and order, linked as it is with the global war against terror." Despite close collaboration between US forces and the Philippine government, the island of Mindanao remains an attractive haven for Islamist extremists. The 35-year-old conflict on Mindanao has taken 120,000 lives and displaced an equal number of persons.

### **Background**

Amina Rasul-Bernardo is president of Women in International Security-Philippines (WIIS-P) and a cofounder of the Mindanao-based Muslim Women Peace Advocates (MWPA), sponsored by the Magbassa Kita Foundation. In coordination with these organizations, which both advocate the inclusion of women in conflict mitigation and resolution processes, Ms. Rasul-Bernardo has organized numerous conferences and focus group discussions, bringing together **representatives of the government, civil society, Moro National Liberation Front, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and US Institute of Peace, among other groups. An expert on issues relating to minority representation and democratic participation in the Philippines—particularly as relates to the Muslim insurgency in Mindanao**—Ms. Rasul-Bernardo is a senior research fellow with the Sycip Policy Center at the Asian Institute of Management in the Philippines. Following the 2003 conference "Muslim Women Waging Peace," Ms. Rasul-Bernardo helped to **present the resulting "Declaration of Muslim Women Waging Peace" to President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo**, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The Declaration asserts the right of Muslim women to actively participate in peace building and enumerates the different ways through which this can be realized. She was the **director of the Development Bank of the Philippines** and the founding director of the Local Government Guarantee Corporation. Ms. Rasul-Bernardo was a **senior fellow at the US Institute of Peace from 2001 to 2002**, focusing on issues of autonomy and federalism. Ms. Rasul-Bernardo holds a **master's degree in business management from the Asian Institute of Management in the Philippines and an M.P.A. from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.**

**The Initiative for Inclusive Security**, a DC-based program of Hunt Alternatives Fund, advocates for the full participation of all stakeholders, especially women, in peace processes. Creating sustainable peace is achieved best by a diverse, citizen-driven approach. Of the many sectors of society currently excluded from peace processes, none is larger—or more critical to success—than women. Since 1999, Inclusive Security has connected more than 500 women experts with over 5,000 policy shapers to collaborate on fresh, workable solutions to long-standing conflicts across the globe. For more information visit [www.InclusiveSecurity.org](http://www.InclusiveSecurity.org).