



**Briefing:  
International Contact Group for the  
Southern Philippines Peace Process**

Democratic  
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Institute



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## Foreword

This paper forms part of DPI's research series examining the Southern Philippines peace process. It aims to provide an overview of the role of the International Contact Group, the first ever formal hybrid mediation support initiative of its kind; developed over 15 years of negotiations in the Philippines and bringing together various NGOs and diplomats.

The Democratic Progress Institute aims to create an inclusive environment in which different parties are able to participate in frank, structured discussions on peace and democracy in Turkey and the wider region. Our work provides opportunities for state and civil society actors to share their ideas and concerns, meet with experts from Turkey and abroad, and learn from comparative experiences of conflict and conflict resolution. In these forums, DPI strives to reinforce collaboration between academics, civil society, and policy-makers in an effort to identify common priorities and devise new ways to promote peace and democracy.

To enrich these discussions, DPI conducts research on a wide range of strategic and relevant topics, including constitutional reform, governance models in conflict societies, cultural and language rights, political participation and representation, the role of women in conflict resolution, and transitional justice. Our innovative model combines research and practical approaches in order to broaden bases for wider public involvement in the promotion of peace and democracy.

With thanks to Cicelie Vobe for her contribution to the research of this paper.



Kerim Yildiz

**Director**

**Democratic Progress Institute**

August 2014

Briefing:

## **International Contact Group for the Southern Philippines Peace Process**

### **Who are they?**

The International Contact Group (ICG) in Mindanao is the first ever formal hybrid mediation support initiative.

It developed organically over 15 years of drawn-out negotiations. Diplomats and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) played complementary roles, strengthening the overall value of their participation.

The ICG for the Mindanao peace process was established in 2009 by the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). It is composed of four states – the United Kingdom, Japan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia; and four INGOs – Conciliation Resources from the UK, Muhammadiyah from Indonesia, The Asia Foundation (TAF) from the USA, and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) from Switzerland. It is the first of its kind, where NGOs and diplomats work together in a formal and permanent setting. The overarching purpose of the ICG, as defined by the parties, has been to “accompany and mobilise international support for the peace process” and to “exert proper leverage and sustain the interests of the parties as well as maintain a level of comfort that restores mutual trust”.

## **What do they do?**

The ICG are:

- Committed to ending conflict in Mindanao through peaceful negotiations.
- Dedicated to the successful outcome of the GRP-MILF Peace Process.
- Recognizing the role that interested countries and INGOs can play in supporting the success of the GRP-MILF peace process.

The ICG tries to provide a more inclusive peace process, negotiating and facilitating talks with both sides. The ICG attended and observed negotiations in Kuala Lumpur and is mandated to maintain trust between the parties and ensure the implementation of mutually agreed approaches.

The NGOs are specifically tasked to act as a bridge between the parties, the facilitator, local partners, business and others; provide technical assistance to the parties; and support communications for peace advocacy. Their core challenge is to commit to confidentiality while advocating for inclusion and transparency.

In Mindanao, diplomats and INGOs developed a strong sense of partnership, providing complementary expertise. For example, Japan focused on funding infrastructure projects, whilst the UK shared lessons from the Northern Ireland peace process. Conciliation Resources provided analysis of draft documents from the peace panels and discussion papers on transition, normalisation and

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devolution of policing. TAF focused on strengthening governance. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) brought in high profile ‘eminent persons’ to input on topics such as power sharing and wealth sharing. Muhammadiyah brought its experience of providing health and education services in Indonesia.

The overarching purpose of the ICG, as defined by the parties, has been to “accompany and mobilise international support for the peace process” and to “exert proper leverage and sustain the interest of the parties as well as maintain a level of comfort that restores mutual trust”.

The Philippian Government and the MILF agreed to a hybrid Contact Group as a compromise to the MILF’s eagerness to internationalise the peace talks and the Government’s aversion to external interference in domestic affairs.

### **How do they work?**

Mediation Support – keeping a low profile and providing support to both sides.

The Functions of the Mindanao ICG are:

- Attend and observe negotiations on the invitation of the parties and facilitator.
- Provide discreet advice.
- Provide expert assistance on specific issues.

- Meet any of the parties upon request to help resolve substantive issues.
- INGOs were additionally requested to “act as a bridge between parties, ICG, facilitator, and local partners in support of the peace process”.

The ICG mandate:

- To implement the mutually agreed approaches during the negotiation on a regular and consistent basis, taking into consideration the mission-specific strategies and security arrangements in cooperation with both parties.
- To determine their mode of operation, including funding, as well as the adoption of their own internal rules consistent with its mandate, function and role.
- To continue its role and function in ensuring the successful implementation of signed agreements.

### **What is their role in the Philippines?**

The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro reached on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2012 between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front signals an end to more than four decades of armed conflict in Mindanao. With the facilitation of the Government of Malaysia and the support of the International Contact Group one of the most protracted conflicts in the world is being brought to a close after 15 years of negotiations. This agreement sets the principles for a transition that will put a

closure to four decades of armed conflict and will create a new self-governing entity in Muslim dominated areas in Mindanao called the Bangsamoro.

Since the negotiating parties in the conflict in the Philippines had initiated the ICG, they were also responsible for selecting its members. Both peace panels have indicated that key considerations for selection included:

- The strength of support given by the state and relevant experience of the INGO to peace in Mindanao.
- Recognised expertise in the field of conflict transformation.
- The desire to include both Western and Muslim participants.
- The Government's reluctance to include big powers and multilaterals.
- The MILF's reluctance to consider countries that provided military aid to the Philippines Armed Forces (such as the US and Australia).

Peace talks formally resumed in December 2009 in Kuala Lumpur, 15 months after the 2008 breakdown. The parties were to meet a further 16 times before a framework agreement was signed in October 2012.

The IGC operated during the talks and outside them as well in various ways:

- Supporting progress of formal negotiations:

The IGC members observed and took notes during the rounds of talks. They interacted with both parties, offering advice and exploring options to facilitate the discussion and break the deadlock at such moments. Occasionally they would produce draft documents for the discussions, such as terms of reference for some of the implementation bodies. The two negotiating parties would also separately brief the IGC after each round. This helped assess developments and identify areas where IGC members could help in preparations for the next round of talks.

- Supporting the peace process outside official talks:

The IGC was most active between rounds of meetings. Embassies would regularly meet with lawmakers in Manila and governors and mayors from Mindanao, to listen to their concerns and suggestions, as well as exert diplomatic leverage in support of the peace negotiations. The UK and Japan also increased financial support for development and humanitarian assistance in Mindanao. In accordance with IGC terms of reference, INGOs worked with local civil society to promote cross-community dialogue. They also provided technical and financial support to local NGOs, and invited external experts to share lessons from other peace processes with the panels, as well as with civil society organisations in Mindanao and other stakeholders in Manila including the business and security sectors, media, and academics.

- Conciliation Resources and gender in Mindanao:  
The ICG advocates the empowerment of women. Conciliation Resources aided the ICG in rethinking and establishing the roles of women during the peace process talks.

### **What was Turkey's role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

In 2009, Turkey and the Philippines made two agreements to enhance the legal and economic framework for trade and investment cooperation between the two countries.

Turkey reaffirmed its support for the peace process in Mindanao and the interfaith dialogue that was taking place there.

An article on the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs website said Turkish President Abdullah Gul relayed this to DFA Secretary Alberto Romulo during Romulo's visit there: "On the ongoing peace process in the Southern Philippines, President Gul said Turkey, bilaterally and as member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and member of the Peace Committee of the Southern Philippines, affirmed its strong support to the Philippine government's efforts to establish durable peace and enhance socio-economic development in the south," the DFA said.

Islamic Diplomacy, which includes Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Indonesian NGO Muhammadiyah are all Muslim entities which played a role in the peace building process. Malaysia also played a large part in the peace process as a facilitator; as the talks were held

in Kuala Lumpur.

The Turkish embassy in Kuala Lumpur sent a delegate to most of the peace talks, occasionally staying for almost the full duration of the talks, which can be from three to five days. At the Ministerial Meeting Preparatory to the 12<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit Conference of the OIC in Cairo in February 2013, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu welcomed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB), congratulated Malaysia for it, and supported the pending application for observer status of the Philippines.

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a conference on mediation on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 with the purpose of looking into theory and practice of mediation around the world. The Mindanao case was used as an exemplary case study.

### **What was the UK's role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

The United Kingdom shared its experience of the peace process in Northern Ireland with the ICG and the Philippian government. Experts from the Northern Irish conflict and peace process were also brought into the talks in Kuala Lumpur to aid and to advise. Although the UK participated with the ICG, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advised against all travel to southwest Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago in 2013. “Although there is hope that the 2013 framework peace agreement will bring the 40-year insurgency in the south of the country to an end, extreme elements within the two main insurgent groups, the

Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), continue to pose a security threat,” the FCO said.

### **What was Saudi Arabia’s role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

Saudi Arabia’s participation has been very limited and is more symbolic. Their embassy in Manila has never joined an ICG meeting. Their embassy in Kuala Lumpur occasionally sends a delegate to attend the peace talks but briefly, for just a few hours.

### **What was Japan’s role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

The Japanese Self-Defence Forces undertook massive humanitarian operations during the aftermath of the Yolanda typhoon (aka Typhoon Haiyan). In addition to being the Philippines’ leading trading and investment partner, Japan is also relaxing visa restrictions for Filipinos and contemplating a more robust presence in post-conflict Mindanao.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Research and Education for Peace, Universiti Sains Malaysia (REPUSM) organized the three-day Consolidation for Peace for Mindanao COP6 event.

Japanese support toward Mindanao started after the then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the launch of the “Japan–Bangsamoro Initiatives for Reconstruction and Development”

(J-BIRD) in December 2006 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of normalization of ties between the Philippines and Japan. Since then, Japan had been party to the Mindanao peace process and helped efforts toward post-conflict reconstruction and development at the grass-roots level. J-BIRD's objective has been to support the process of peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF by offering assistance in the area of reconstruction and development to the conflict and poverty stricken Bangsamoro.

Japan was the first foreign donor to assist Bangsamoro financially. Its assistance has reached more than 12 billion yen, which is about US\$130 million, ensuring the Japanese's strong relationship with both the government and the MILF, which later resulted in both the Philippine government and the MILF requesting that Japan be placed on the ICG. The previous relationship that Japan had fostered with both parties came into use when the peace process negotiations were held up and trust between the two parties began breaking down. Japan played an important role in bringing the two parties back into dialogue.

The Japanese government has expressed the following assistance in the transition period to the Philippine government:

- Assistance toward the consolidation of peace.
- Assistance toward institutional building and human capacity development.
- Assistance in regional infrastructure and community development.

## **What was Muhammadiyah's role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

Muhammadiyah accepted the invitation to join the ICG as “in line with the mission and identity of Muhammadiyah as an Islamic movement.” They are very committed as part of the ICG and never missed a single round of peace talks. They also convened multiple activities in Indonesia to increase social awareness and political support for the Mindanao peace process. They invited the MILF, GPH and ICG to peace events in Indonesia, where they provide health and educational services, and have done some bridging between the MILF and MNLF. Furthermore, the organisation conducted exploratory visits to Mindanao to identify how best they can contribute with their expertise in human development. Their major constraint is their lack of a formal mandate to do international collaboration, and therefore have limited human and financial resources.

## **What was The Asia Foundation's role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

In Mindanao, The Asia Foundation draws on long-standing relationships and utilizes its on-the-ground presence to help identify partners from the private sector, civil society, and government who will constructively work together toward peace and development. A core contribution from The Asia Foundation is strengthening governance.

Moreover, a main objective of the Asian Foundation is to spur growth and investment, the foundation is assisting the local governments and private sector in tourist locations to promote growth. The organisation has also worked in the Philippines through programmes such as the ‘Regional Roll-On, Roll-Off’ network with ASEAN and China. TAF is also implementing the USAID supported COMPETE project, with the US-Philippines ‘Partnership for growth’; this project will improve road, sea, air and power infrastructures. The Asia Foundation also works with the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in the Philippines to increase the amount of PWDs working in a range of development issues. The foundation also has strong ties with human rights and works with the Commission on Human Rights with the intention of improving the Martus based Executive Information System (MARTEIS), the only official database of human rights violations in the country. The organisation links with the courts and involves itself in human right court cases.

### **What was The HD Centre’s role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

The European Union has supported the HD Centre’s involvement in the Mindanao peace process.

Since February 2004, the HD Centre has provided support to the Royal Norwegian Government (RNG) in its role as a third party facilitator to peace talks between the Government of the Republic

of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF), which negotiates on behalf of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its military wing, the New People's Army (NPA).

As a member of the ICG, the HD Centre has provided support to both parties and the Malaysian Facilitator Tengku Dato Abdul Ghafar.

The HD Centre for Human Dialogue has also mediated in local clan conflict in the Philippines and has been a key member in helping the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Foundation (MILF) reach a landmark peace agreement on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014, which was based on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

The HD Centre has also worked closely with the Mindanao Think Tank (MTT) with the aim to build and nurture relations between Christian, Muslim and Lumad peoples to help ensure greater awareness of the peace process by the communities and greater awareness of the communities in the peace process by the negotiating government and MILF.

They are also working with the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, which is tasked with drafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

## **What was Conciliation Resources' role in the Peace Process in the Philippines?**

Conciliation Resources received a specific endorsement by a group of local civil society organisations, which wrote to both

peace panels requesting the inclusion of the organisation in the ICG. Conciliation Resources' involvement in Mindanao dates back to 1999 when it documented the Mindanao peace process in its Accord publication, "Compromising on Autonomy." In the following years its relations with local NGOs developed further, evolving into comparative learning exchanges to share lessons from other peace processes. Conciliation Resources works in partnership with many groups from a grassroots level to the political elite, specialising their work in women, peace and security. In September 2013 they started a 7-month project funded by the United Kingdom to Entrench Women's Participation in the Basic Law of the Bangsamoro, which they are developing with three Muslim and one Indigenous women's organisation. At the same time they started implementing a 3 year project funded by the EU to Promote Public Participation in the Peace Process, which will focus on the Basic Law of the Bangsamoro; the police reform; and human rights and transitional justice. The main implementers are 8 Mindanao based partners.

## **DPI Board and Council of Experts**

### **Director:**

#### **Kerim Yildiz**

Kerim Yildiz is Director of DPI. He is an expert in international human rights law and minority rights, and is the recipient of a number of awards, including from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights for his services to protect human rights and promote the rule of law in 1996, the Sigrid Rausing Trust's Human Rights award for Leadership in Indigenous and Minority Rights in 2005, and the Gruber Prize for Justice in 2011. Kerim has written extensively on human rights and international law, and his work has been published internationally.

### **DPI Board Members:**

#### **Nicholas Stewart QC (Chair)**

Barrister and Deputy High Court Judge (Chancery and Queen's Bench Divisions), United Kingdom . Former Chair of the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales and Former President of Union Internationale des Avocats.

#### **Professor Penny Green (Secretary)**

Head of Research and Director of the School of Law's Research Programme at King's College London and Director of the International State Crime Initiative (ICSI), United Kingdom (a collaborative enterprise with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and the University of Hull, led by King's College London).

## **Priscilla Hayner**

Co-founder of the International Centre for Transitional Justice, global expert and author on truth commissions and transitional justice initiatives, consultant to the Ford Foundation, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and numerous other organisations.

## **Arild Humlen**

Lawyer and Director of the Norwegian Bar Association's Legal Committee. Widely published within a number of jurisdictions, with emphasis on international civil law and human rights. Has lectured at law faculties of several universities in Norway. Awarded the Honor Prize of the Bar Association for Oslo for his work as Chairman of the Bar Association's Litigation Group for Asylum and Immigration law.

## **Jacki Muirhead**

Practice Director, Cleveland Law Firm. Previously Barristers' Clerk at Counsels' Chambers Limited and Marketing Manager at the Faculty of Advocates. Undertook an International Secondment at New South Wales Bar Association.

## **Professor David Petrasek**

Professor of International Political Affairs at the University of Ottawa, Canada. Expert and author on human rights, humanitarian law and conflict resolution issues, former Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of Amnesty International, consultant to United Nations.

## **Antonia Potter Prentice**

Expert in humanitarian, development, peacemaking and peacebuilding issues. Consultant on women, peace and security; and strategic issues to clients including the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, the Global Network of Women Peacemakers, Mediator, and Terre des Hommes.

## **DPI Council of Experts**

### **Dermot Ahern**

Dermot Ahern is a Former Irish Member of Parliament and Government Minister and was a key figure for more than 20 years in the Irish peace process, including in negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. He also has extensive experience at EU Council level including being a key negotiator and signatory to the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaties. In 2005, he was appointed by the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to be a Special Envoy on his behalf on the issue of UN Reform. Previous roles include that of Government Chief Whip, Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Justice and Law Reform. Dermot Ahern also served as Co-Chairman of the British Irish Inter Parliamentary Body 1993 – 1997.

## **Dr Mehmet Asutay**

Dr Mehmet Asutay is a Reader in Middle Eastern and Islamic Political Economy and Finance at the School of Government and International Affairs (SGIA), Durham University, UK. He researches, teaches and supervises research on Middle Eastern economic development, the political economy of Middle East including Turkish and Kurdish political economies, and Islamic political economy. He is the Honorary Treasurer of BRISMES (British Society for Middle East Studies) and of the International Association for Islamic Economics. His research has been published in various journals, magazines and also in book format. He has been involved in human rights issues in various levels for many years, and has a close interest in transitional justice, conflict resolution and development issues at academic and policy levels.

## **Christine Bell**

Legal expert based in Northern Ireland; expert on transitional justice, peace negotiations, constitutional law and human rights law advice. Trainer for diplomats, mediators and lawyers.

## **Cengiz Çandar**

Senior Journalist and columnist specializing in areas such as The Kurdish Question, former war correspondent. Served as special adviser to Turkish president Turgut Ozal.

## **Yilmaz Ensaroğlu**

SETA Politics Economic and Social Research Foundation. Member of the Executive Board of the Joint Platform for Human Rights, the Human Rights Agenda Association (İHGD) and Human Rights Research Association (İHAD), Chief Editor of the Journal of the Human Rights Dialogue.

## **Dr. Salomón Lerner Febres**

Former President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Perú; Executive President of the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights of the Pontifical Catholic University of Perú.

## **Professor Mervyn Frost**

Head of the Department of War Studies, King's College London. Previously served as Chair of Politics and Head of Department at the University of Natal in Durban. Former President of the South African Political Studies Association; expert on human rights in international relations, humanitarian intervention, justice in world politics, democratising global governance, just war tradition in an Era of New Wars and ethics in a globalising world.

## **Martin Griffiths**

Founding member and first Executive Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Served in the British Diplomatic Service, and in British NGOs, Ex -Chief Executive of Action Aid. Held posts as United Nations (UN) Director of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva and Deputy to the UN

Emergency Relief Coordinator, New York. Served as UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Great Lakes, UN Regional Coordinator in the Balkans and UN Assistant Secretary-General.

### **Dr. Edel Hughes**

Senior Lecturer, University of East London. Expert on international human rights and humanitarian law, with special interest in civil liberties in Ireland, emergency/anti-terrorism law, international criminal law and human rights in Turkey and Turkey's accession to European Union. Previous lecturer with Amnesty International and a founding member of Human Rights for Change.

### **Avila Kilmurray**

A founder member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and was part of the Coalition's negotiating team for the Good Friday Agreement. She has written extensively on community action, the women's movement and conflict transformation. Serves on the Board of Conciliation Resources (UK); the Global Fund for Community Foundations; Conflict Resolution Services Ireland and the Institute for British Irish Studies. Avila was the first Women's Officer for the Transport & General Workers Union for Ireland (1990-1994) and became Director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland in 1994. Avila was awarded the Raymond Georis Prize for Innovative Philanthropy through the European Foundation Centre.

## **Professor Ram Manikkalingam**

Visiting Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, served as Senior Advisor on the Peace Process to President of Sri Lanka, expert and author on conflict, multiculturalism and democracy, founding board member of the Laksham Kadirgamar Institute for Strategic Studies and International Relations.

## **Bejan Matur**

Renowned Turkey based Author and Poet. Columnist, focusing mainly on Kurdish politics, the Armenian issue, daily politics, minority problems, prison literature, and women's issues. Has won several literary prizes and her work has been translated into 17 languages. Former Director of the Diyarbakır Cultural Art Foundation (DKSV).

## **Professor Monica McWilliams**

Professor of Women's Studies, based in the Transitional Justice Institute at the University of Ulster. Was the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission from 2005-2011 and responsible for delivering the advice on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition political party and was elected to a seat at the Multi-Party Peace Negotiations, which led to the Belfast (Good Friday) Peace Agreement in 1998. Served as a member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly from 1998-2003 and the Northern Ireland Forum for Dialogue and Understanding from 1996-1998. Publications focus on domestic violence, human security and the role of women in peace processes.

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## **Jonathan Powell**

British diplomat, Downing Street Chief of Staff under Prime Minister Tony Blair between 1997- 2007. Chief negotiator in Northern Ireland peace talks, leading to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Currently CEO of Inter Mediate, a United Kingdom -based non-state mediation organization.

## **Sir Kieran Prendergast**

Served in the British Foreign Office, including in Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, the Netherlands, Kenya and New York; later head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office dealing with Apartheid and Namibia; former UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Convenor of the SG's Executive Committee on Peace and Security and engaged in peacemaking efforts in Afghanistan, Burundi, Cyprus, the DRC, East Timor, Guatemala, Iraq, the Middle East, Somalia and Sudan.

## **Rajesh Rai**

Rajesh was called to the Bar in 1993. His areas of expertise include Human Rights Law, Immigration and Asylum Law, and Public Law. Rajesh has extensive hands-on experience in humanitarian and environmental issues in his work with NGOs, cooperatives and companies based in the UK and overseas. He also lectures on a wide variety of legal issues, both for the Bar Human Rights Committee and internationally.

## **Professor Naomi Roht Arriaza**

Professor at University of Berkeley, United States, expert and author on transitional justice, human rights violations, international criminal law and global environmental issues.

## **Professor Dr. Mithat Sancar**

Professor of Law at the University of Ankara, expert and author on Constitutional Citizenship and Transitional Justice, columnist for Taraf newspaper.



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