

Post Tsunami Reconstruction and Peace Building in Aceh: Political Impacts and Potential Risks

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ABSTRACT

This working paper illustrates the political development and potential impacts/risks in the post-tsunami Aceh reconstruction process, particularly after the signing of the peace agreement in Helsinki, August 2005. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is indeed a decisive momentum that marked the transformation of the political landscape in Aceh in the process of healing a region torn by conflicts and tsunamis. The signing of the peace agreement is, nevertheless, the 'easiest' part of the peace building efforts. Challenges and complications are manifold.

This paper will briefly brush on the 30 decades of conflict in Aceh and identify aspects of conflict in Aceh post-MoU. Afterwards, this paper will highlight the effect of tsunami toward government's policies, how the policy has shifted and how the political constellation develops. It will also depict government's efforts to "win the hearts and minds of the Acehnese" and where civil society fits in. In the last part of the paper, some critical aspects of future outlook will conclude this depiction.

Keywords: Aceh, conflict, political development, BRR, MoU Helsinki, civil society, participation

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I. 30 YEARS OF PAIN: HISTORY OF THE ACEH CONFLICT¹

The first hallmark of the “Aceh Problem” was the **Darul Islam (DI) uprising in 1953**, which demanded the establishment of an Islamic state of Indonesia. The DI rebellion ended in 1961 with Jakarta’s promise of special autonomy status for Aceh. When the promise and the region were neglected, another rebellion broke out **in 1976, in the form of a secessionist movement led by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)** that directly challenged the ‘territorial integrity of the republic’. Despite the success of Indonesian security operation to defeat GAM in 1977, GAM rebelled again in 1989 and swiftly diffused by another military crackdown.

Throughout military operations, particularly during **the Military Operations Zone (DOM) period from 1990 until 1998, sympathy towards GAM grew** as loathes against the unbridled violations of human rights by the military and government of Indonesia (GoI)’s inability to address the root problems persisted. Rizal Sukma depicted that “[a]t the risk of oversimplifying, the sources of the problem can be grouped into four basic aspects: economic exploitation; centralism and uniformity; military repression; and the politics of impunity.”² Though GAM’s military strength had been severely undermined by 1992, military operations continued until 1998, during which several conflicts had served only to justify redeployment of military forces into Aceh. Instead of committing to toppling counterinsurgencies, the military went amok with abuses.

The fall of the Soeharto regime was utilized by GAM to strike again in November 1998. Inevitably, GAM immediately gained greater public support in particular in rural areas – despite GoI’s denial

¹ Paper prepared for the ‘Regional Conference on Political and Economic Impacts/Risks For Sustainable Reconstruction in the Tsunami Affected Areas’ in Chennai, India, 18– 21 October 2005, organised by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), India. This paper benefits immensely from the inputs from colleagues at CSIS, particularly Rizal Sukma, J. Kristiadi, and Indra J. Piliang, and various respondents from the Aceh Recovery Forum (ARF) Banda Aceh, numerous local and international NGOs and donor organizations, whose names cannot all be mentioned. Mistakes, however, remain to be the author’s responsibility. The author also thanks FES Indonesia for the opportunity to present this paper.

² Sukma, Rizal. 2004. *Security Operations in Aceh: Goals, Consequences, and Lessons*. Washington: Policy Studies – East West Centre.

over GAM's political agenda and the continued process of criminalization³. Despite the euphoria of reform on the national level **after 1998, degree of distrust against GoI continued to climb in parallel with failures of reform in Aceh**. The mishmash of past dreadful legacies, continued government incompetence and human rights abuses further complicated conflict situations. Military operations and arms clashes continued to cause lives throughout 1999 until 2001 even though President Abdurrahman Wahid (elected in 1999) passed the special autonomy law (formally stipulates concessions in politics and economy) and opened the space for political dialogue in 2000 that led to an agreement to have the Humanitarian Pause. Escalation of conflict that began in 1999 peaked in 2001 at the expense of the Humanitarian Pause.

After Wahid was impeached, his successor, Megawati, continued with the non-military approach and **peace talk began in February 2002 and resulted in a Cessation of Hostility Agreement (COHA) in December 2002**. The COHA process was marred with sporadic clashes, and it officially collapsed when the Joint Security Committee office was attack early 2003. Under great pressures from the military, state institutions and general public, Megawati administration declared **martial law in Aceh on 19 May 2003** (Presidential Decree No. 28/2003). Violations of human rights continued and socio-economic improvement was almost impossible with the perpetuation of conflict and rampant corruption.⁴

Early 2004, secretive efforts towards peace that led to the Helsinki talks were made by Jusuf Kalla prior to his appointment as vice president. When it leaked, elites in both GAM and TNI who were not involved were upset and questioned the process. By November 2004, however, the GoI was ready to pursue the "9 Points of Agreement between Negotiators of the GoI and GAM". The process was interrupted on 26 December 2004 when tsunami brought into Aceh miseries and a

³ The process of criminalization constitutes the discounting of existing political agendas (e.g. separatism and/or anti-government actions) as mere criminal acts.

⁴ In his paper Sukma (2004) mentioned World Bank's 2002 report that enlists Aceh as the second poorest province in Indonesia and Central Bank's 2001 report as the most corrupt.

different momentum for peace. After 5 rounds of meetings⁵, a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on 15 August 2005.**⁶ By early October 2005, the process of Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration (DDR) has progressed quite smoothly with no major clashes and monitored by the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) with some 220 peace monitors from EU and ASEAN.⁷

II. ASPECTS OF CONFLICT IN POST-TSUNAMI ACEH

Of potential conflicts that may occur, particularly after the Helsinki peace agreement, there are several portraits worth pointing out. It is important to note that each aspect is not independent from another. The dynamics of one aspect may affect the other thus a comprehensive outlook in depicting potential conflicts in Post Tsunami Aceh is imperative. The order of exigency may shift depending on the period and areas involved.

First is **the return of ex-GAM members** from prisons outside Aceh, from GAM uphill stations, and from abroad. The presence of the latter will bring new political dynamics as the local political party discourse, which is already a controversy to the current national political and legal structure, unfolds. Many have hoped that the inception of local party will channel ex GAM's political aspirations from weapons to party programs. The Parliament (DPR-RI)'s resistance on the national level to the concept may hamper the peace process. Another option for political participation is through the recently established Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (*Badan Rehabilitasi dan*

⁵ The meetings dated 27-29 January, 21-23 February, 12-16 April, 26-31 May, and 12-17 July 2005. The MoU comprises of provision on governance, political participation, economy, rule of law, human rights, amnesty and reintegration, security arrangements, monitoring, and dispute resolution.

⁶ ICG Asia Briefing No. 40. 2005. *Aceh: A New Chance for Peace*. Jakarta/Brussels – International Crisis Group.

⁷ By the end of October, an estimation of 12,000 TNI troops and over 1,000 police officers will be pulled out of Aceh, while GAM surrenders over half of its weapons. A total of 20,000 soldiers are expected to be pulled out from Aceh by December 2005 as targeted under the peace accord. On mid September, after the transition, ex GAM Commanders from different areas have gathered and decided upon a new name 'Aceh Transition Committee (*Komite Peralihan Aceh* or KPA). The media, however, is still using the term 'GAM'. This paper will use 'ex GAM' to refer to the group until a clearer structural illustration of the KPA appears and formalized by the government and acknowledged by public.

Rekonstruksi or BRR). The MoU stipulates that ex GAM members are allowed to participate fully in the BRR.

A particularly alarming situation with regard to the returning ex GAM members is the ones coming from GAM uphill stations, which constitute unskilled, unemployed and relatively hostile youth, dubbed as the “invisible youth”⁸. These groups are feared to instigate brawls and extortions, particularly if the distribution of livelihood funds (*jatah hidup* or *jadup*) and economic activities that could generate employment fail to materialize.

Second is the commitment for and process of disarmament, demobilization and re-integration (DDR) processes. Though in the media, the TNI and ex GAM commanders have been exchanging compliments, ‘**spoilers of peace**’⁹ (militia) remain to be a concern in this and there is no telling whether they come from TNI or ex GAM’s part or both. The Aceh Working Group (AWG) has identified around 14 anti-GAM militias with thousands of members (e.g. ‘Red and White Youth Movement or *Gerakan Pemuda Merah Putih* with 25,000 members, Anti GAM Separatist Front or *Front Perlawanan Separatis GAM* with 62,000, etc).¹⁰ There are also concerns that the ‘invisible youth’ may join these gangs and instigate extortions, arms clashes, and intimidations to the public. Nevertheless, so far, the AMM has brought a positive atmosphere for both conflicting parties and public confidence is rising.¹¹

Third is the **horizontal dynamics between diverse community groups** in Aceh, which consist of various religious (Moslem is a majority), ethnic, clan and other groups – particularly in relations to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Reports of “Christianization” in disguise of humanitarian

⁸ Syamsu Rizal Panggabean, quoted from a discussion forum in the workshop “Nine Months after the Earthquake and Tsunami in Aceh: Policy Assessment” hosted by CSIS and the Aceh Recovery Forum, Medan, 6-9 October 2005.

⁹ Sukma, Rizal. 2005. ‘The Long Road of Aceh Peace Process [*Jalan Panjang Proses Perdamaian Aceh*] in the Jakarta Post. 18 July 2005. See: http://www.csis.or.id/scholars_opinion_view.asp?op_id=364&id=46&tab=0.

¹⁰ Otto Syamsuddin Ishak from AWG as quoted in ‘Presence of Militia will Disturb MoU in NAD [Keberadaan Milisi Dikhawatirkan Ganggu MoU di NAD]’ in *Suara Pembaruan*. 14 September 2005.

works, though heavily screened by national media, could be found in the local media. Accusations against certain humanitarian agencies of proselytizing Moslems to Christians have led to heated demonstrations and numerous sweepings by students or religious youth groups in various regions. The miserable situations of over 150,000 IDPs, who dwell in deteriorating barracks, lacking in adequate sanitation, resources and basic needs, unemployed, alienated and frustrated can be found in various parts of Aceh and may be sensitive to social tensions. Ethnic and/or Clan sentiments may manifest into local parties that could sharpen social tensions.

Fourth is **political elites' dynamics**, especially in the face of the upcoming **local direct election (PILKADA)**, which is scheduled for April 2006 and the recent demand from 11 district authorities for **the partition of the single NAD province to 3 provinces**.¹² The first referred to the existing habit of Indonesian political parties to rouse primordial sentiments – in the case of Aceh, more alarms over ethnic, clan, and territorial sentiments – in mobilizing mass supports during campaign, which may have a post-election spill over effect, especially by the unsatisfied losers. The demand for territorial partition embodies the frictions between district and provincial authority. The district demanded that unless the provincial authority accommodates these demands, they will submit the case to central authority for settlement. The given deadline is 4 December – ironically, the same date as the anniversary of GAM. Despite the resistance of the provincial authority (governor office and regional parliament), the central authorities (particularly Ministry of Home Affairs, military, and several major parties in the Parliament) regard this proposal positively. There is no explicit regulation on territorial partition in the MoU, but article 1.1.4 stipulates that “The borders of Aceh correspond to the borders as of 1 July 1956”, which imply that no changes on territorial matters are advised. This aspect is related to the earlier one (horizontal conflict) because the **territorial partition is also in parallel to ethnic constellation** – aside to the Acehnese, there are also Gayo,

¹¹ Conflict and Community Development Report. September 2005. Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update. Banda Aceh/Jakarta – World Bank. Available at www.conflictanddevelopment.org.

¹² The demands for 2 new provinces – Aceh Leuser Antara & Aceh Barat Selatan have been proposed even prior to the tsunami. Recently, such demands came again on 12 October 2005.

Alas, Batak, Mandailing, Pakpak and Java. The inland groups even prior to the tsunami have long felt marginalized by the coastal groups and the reconstruction agenda has been regarded as benefiting only the coastal groups.

Fifth is the **interaction between government institutions** that determines the speed, flow and scope of the reconstruction and peace building process. The holder of reconstruction mandate is the BRR. For the reconstruction process itself (prior to the Helsinki MoU), there have been reports of competitions between government agencies and pride clashes amidst structural confusion between existing authorities. On the other front, though not involved directly in the DDR process, BRR's role in managing reconstruction process is a crucial pillar for a holistic peace building process. Criticisms are rising against BRR for being slow and ineffective in coordinating existing works of government agencies, international and local agencies. Regional government/Governor office and line ministries are not exactly the most effective and cooperative agencies as well.

Sixth is **the interaction between international actors and local players**, particularly in dealing with housing and shelters, and other welfare related development. "Positive, but no decisive"¹³ is the general description of the extent to which **international agencies and donors** have contributed to the dynamics of conflict. Though the presence of international agencies have somewhat eased up the atmosphere, social ramifications also occurred due to the lack of general knowledge on the Acehese cultural and social values and the high turnover of the international staffs. Some of the proselytizing allegations were directed to several international NGOs. The huge gap in livelihood and salary between foreign and local staff has also been criticized due to the inflation effect caused by the presence of international agencies and NGOs. Another international element recently established is the **AMM**, who bears a critical mandate of deciding upon disputed aspects of the

¹³ Burke, Adam. 2005. *Aceh: Reconstruction in a Conflict Environment – Views from Civil Society, Donors and NGOs*. Jakarta: DFID Working Paper. For draft paper, contact: adamitobur@yahoo.com.

MoU, once the GoI and ex GAM are unable reach consensus. Impartiality and diplomacy of AMM are therefore indispensable to the peace building process.

III. EFFECTS OF TSUNAMI ON GOVERNMENT POLICIES

“Divine intervention” is what some people would define the tsunami. However painful the losses might have been, perhaps there are some blessings coming in for the conflict-torn area. **The tsunami crippled some of local government capacities**, which had already grown inefficient, corrupt, and highly elitist due to jagged central-local relations after three decades of conflict. This explained their poor performance in handling the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. The military was pretty damaged as well thus shifting the priority to humanitarian emergency relief.

The tragedy definitely shifted most of the attention from conflict to survival. The atmosphere of conflict that taunted most Acehnese and the “threat of separatism” in the eyes of general Indonesians were no longer that pervasive. With the spate of global media coverage, it suddenly became “politically incorrect” if politicians (national level, especially) did not support any positive efforts towards a better Aceh. This in itself is an important impetus to find solutions to the RI-GAM conflict problems considering the ultra-nationalist tendency of some national politicians and/or political parties.

The tsunami also broke down the gate that closed Aceh from the outside world, which then allows **the influx of civil society involvement and international players** with multifarious possibilities. As we have known, global aid constellation has shown that global civil society and business sector have outweighed governments in gathering humanitarian funds. The relatively weak government will then not oppose to the flourishing civil society and press freedom, something that was virtually impossible to imagine.

The tsunami positive effects, however, will not guarantee ensuing peace. Though the present development is generally quite encouraging, there are some indicators of concern that must be bear in mind. The devastations of the tsunami have caused loss of lives, properties, legal documents, livelihood, and have severed access to basic needs and sustainable employment. Hungry and depressed people may channel their frustration through violent means, if economic and social concessions are not adequately delivered. Property disputes are likely as the legal documentation of properties is very tardy and housing development has not been as speedy as the barrack's deterioration.

IV. POLICY SHIFT AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The transition of the Aceh conflict would best be regarded more as a shift **from military approach to political/diplomatic approach**, rather than to the internationalization of conflict. The contribution of the international aid and humanitarian agencies are crucial and have brought positive atmosphere in Aceh. Indonesian regards highly this movement of global solidarity. It is in this sense that Aceh is 'internationalized'. It is the 'internationalization of solidarity' that occurred, not 'internationalization of conflict'. When the national ultra-nationalist elites tried to play the "internationalization of conflict" card to the public, the respond was cold, if not negative. What is important to the public is that international agencies and donors are more likely to bring better chances for the tsunami victims. Nevertheless, the decisive variable for the transformation is local/national political development.

The current political approach, in which the military lacks expertise and justification/support, will depend largely on **how decentralization policy is applied in Aceh**. The performance of BRR and the implementation of PILKADA and MoU's mandate are indicative of government policy

directions where **civilian authority could play greater role** and conflict is to be avoided. Allowing **greater public participation** is another aspect that seems quite possible so far, though transparency may not be as convincing. Nevertheless, this could still be considered as good indications.

The fragile spot amongst the points in the Helsinki MoU is **the adoption of the Bill on the Governing of Aceh**. The legalization of this law is one of the essential prerequisites of peace building and will be the basis of political transformation in Aceh. This Law will regulate most of the points of the MoU and this is where the political battle is set in motion. Currently several versions of draft bills have been circulated¹⁴ and consultation process has also begun.

Once the consultation process began, already there are frictions that started when a ‘secret’ draft Bill from the Ministry of Home Affairs was circulated in late September 2005. Several key points outraged the ex GAM representatives, amongst others: (1) Article 39 of the draft stipulates that ‘head of government must never be a foreign citizen’, which automatically discards the ex GAM leaders who have become citizens of either Sweden or other countries; (2) The Nanggroe Guardian or ‘*Wali Nanggroe*’’s role as political or cultural leader.

Other two disputed points are the provision for **local political party** and **independent candidate** for the local direct elections (PILKADA) scheduled for April 2006. The current structures of national politics do not support these two points. The MoU stipulates that within less than one year the GoI must create a feasible environment for “Aceh-based political parties that meet national criteria” (article 1.2.1). This point is feared and hampered by central government because it may bring similar demands from other regions. To them, possible entry point for Aceh’s case is through the revision special autonomy Law No. 18/2001, thus the government is attempting to cater this negotiated points through the new bill. The suggested prerequisite for independent candidate is one

with 5% of the population (not 5% of the eligible voters). If not fulfilled, then candidate must go through political party. The legislation of the Bill will determine whether or not PILKADA will be implemented on time. At this point, ex GAM leaders have two options, either rushing to prepare for April 2005 PILKADA or to support one of the three known candidates. So far, there has been no formal decision made.

The least mentioned aspect of the MoU is the **human rights aspect**. Despite the brouhaha of the MoU, the human rights aspect is perhaps the most neglected one. Even though the MoU accommodates the establishment of the Human Rights Courts and the urgency of reconciliation (through the inception of the Provincial Truth and Reconciliation Commission or KKR), the institutionalization of these points have mostly been overlooked. Law No. 26/2000 on human rights court and Law No. 27/2004 on truth and reconciliation commission guarantee principles of retroactivity, which according to several politicians, will benefit only the ex GAM members who have gotten amnesty – thus can avoid charges in human rights court. This is not the case for GoI security personnel.¹⁵

V. WINNING THE HEARTS AND MINDS

There are several key decisions made by the government that lead to a better public confidence: (1) The establishment of BRR; (2) The signing of the Helsinki MoU; (3) Sustaining civilian supremacy as the political authority over the military; (4) Not restricting public and civil society participation (local, national and international), with the exception of several minor cases of restriction.

¹⁴ The two existing government versions came from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Aceh Provincial authority. The civil society versions came from University of Syiah Kuala, Institution of National Islamic Religion Ar-Raniry, and University of Malikussaleh

¹⁵ Danusubroto, Sidarto. 2005. 'Human Rights Court after RI-GAM MoU [*Pengadilan HAM paska Mou RI-GAM*]' in *Koran Tempo*, 29 September 2005. The debate circles around the retroactive principle. This is considered as detrimental to military personnel, but not ex GAM members, who have got amnesty from the government.

These decisions however vary in their progress. The establishment of the BRR (Presidential Decree No. 2/2005), as a government agency with the highest mandate for Aceh reconstruction, was initially highly regarded. Selected people for upper level management position are reputable person and the selection process was monitored by the media. However, the tardiness of BRR and un-transparent selection process of BRR lower level staff have raised several criticisms that even the establishment of the anti-graft division in BRR was sneered as more ritualistic rather than effective. The tardiness has been a stark contrast to the high salary. Since its inception in April 2005, BRR has yet to accomplish anything significant as one respondent commented after the national coordination meeting in that only 10% of the needed shelters have been built (according to the BRR report. My respondent argued that on the field barely 4% of the houses have been fully built). Unless the BRR moves faster and become more open, it will not succeed in sustaining efforts to win the Acehnese's heart.

BRR has adopted “conflict sensitive development principles”¹⁶ in its policies. The rhetoric of having to build Aceh to a better stage than pre-tsunami was often emphasized during the consultation meetings of the drafting of the blueprint (led by National Development Agency or Bappenas) and the master plan (led supposedly by the BRR). Though policy directions seem favorable, implementations may not be as smooth. This is mainly due to the **poor inter-departmental coordination** that has not been the strongest suit of the Indonesian government. The consequences are poor provision of shelters, basic needs, and water and sanitations facilities that should have been the immediate priority of the reconstruction agency.

The signing of the MoU has generated a different confidence amongst the Acehnese and national community as well as international audiences towards President Yudhoyono's administration. Somehow, to the eyes of the Acehnese, the political will to push for peace is more evident than

ever. Control of the civilian authority and minimum exposure of military leaders over the DDR process and the presence of AMM have led to a relatively smooth withdrawal of the military troops from Aceh. The way the timely implementation of the MoU has been organized so far is quite positive, in the sense that public and civil society participation are not restricted and the mandate of the AMM has yet to be disputed.

VI. THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY¹⁷

Civil society has had substantial contribution ever since the first day of emergency relief. After the emergency relief period had formally been declared to have ended, civil society has also been critical in boosting participation through community-based development programs, dialogue forums, anti-graft advocacy, and legal/policy advocacy. The degree of each contribution, however, varies and these contributions somehow are not balanced and myopic.

There have been numerous complaints of how donors are not inclined to support capacity building of NGOs that focus on democratic governance and policy/legal advocacy. The bulk of the aid was poured into the more expensive and short term development projects, because donors are under pressure to spend immediately. At stake is the longer term capacity building for better local governance and popular participation.

After the MoU was signed, peace building efforts will not succeed without the support of civil society. A suggestion was made during the civil society consultation process in Medan (7-9 October

¹⁶ For a more elaborate description of BRR structure and programs, an official version report can be found from BRR and World Bank report. October 2005. *Building a Better Aceh and Nias: Stocktaking of the Reconstruction Effort*. Banda Aceh/Jakarta – World Bank. The report is available at www.conflictanddevelopment.org.

¹⁷ Civil society organizations refers mostly to local and national NGOs, either just recently established or ones with long history of participation, with commitment to long term agenda for people's welfare and peace in Aceh, with respect over democratic ideals and human rights. This is not to disrespect the valuable contributions of the international NGOs and donors. The purpose is to focus the explanation of the current dynamics from national/local perspectives and to emphasize that long term presence of civil society elements has more direct implications to the current reconstruction and peace building dynamics.

2005) that **a local version of AMM** which comprises of local and national civil society should be established to sustain the achievement of the AMM.

The media is another aspect of civil society that contributes significantly to the reconstruction as well as the peace building process. The reporting gap between the local and national media has been visible. The purpose may range from the technical requirements of coverage – proportional reporting (national media’s tendency to balance coverage with other provinces) to political decision to “filter” some of the events in Aceh for various reasons. “Peace journalism” has been campaigned even prior to tsunami; however, implementation of this ethical approach has yet to materialize.

VII. FUTURE OUTLOOK

The general perception on the future of Aceh is quite positive. Many have felt optimistic of the overall development, despite the earlier mentioned concerns. What is important is to **sustain the stamina for peace building and political reform in post tsunami and post MoU Aceh.**

Strengthening local government capacity through good governance and participatory policy making processes, reforming state structure and optimizing inter-agency coordination must remain paramount. Capacity building of the local government must uphold the principle of subsidiarity as well as decentralization with clear central-provincial-district authority allocation and coordination. Judicial and security reforms must follow to curb and defy corruption and uphold rule of law. In the mean time, coordination function of the BRR for rehabilitation and reconstruction must be optimized and harmonized with the AMM function for peace building. Peace building should remain under the AMM preferably for another 6 months to ensure comprehensive implementation of the MoU.¹⁸

¹⁸ Sukma, Rizal. 2005. 'The Existence of Post MoU GAM [*Eksistensi GAM pasca-MoU*] in the Jakarta Post. 9 September 2005. See: http://www.csis.or.id/scholars_opinion_view.asp?op_id=384&id=46&tab=0.

Channeling ex GAM members social and political aspiration must also be maintained, either through political parties, government agencies (executive, legislative and BRR, for example), and other socio-cultural body (Wali Nanggroe).

In the mean time, **the institutionalization and empowerment of civil society participation** should also follow so that civil society can be a strategic part of the reconstruction and peace building process. Civil society has contributed significantly in the emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes. The recent civil society meeting in Syiah Kuala University on 11 October 2005, which involves over 1,500 people from various parts of Aceh and outside (including ex GAM members), for example, gives important legitimacy and create sense of belonging to the legislation process of the Bill on the Governing of Aceh. The public event also manages peaceful political dialogues amongst the community that is worth supporting for. The Civil society version of AMM is a suggestion worth close consideration. Media participation should promote effective reconstruction and peace building process.

The advocacy process of the Bill on the Governing of Aceh is a delicate process that may challenge the peace process. Ex GAM members would battle their political aspiration through this advocacy channel and once it is blocked, resorting to arms conflict may happen. The AMM in this case is crucial in shedding possibilities of conflict and maintain impartiality and proactive diplomacy between the GoI and ex GAM leaders.

Most importantly, **political negotiation between the government and ex GAM members in implementing the MoU must not overshadow the plights of the general Acehnese**, who have long fell victim to the clashes of two titans and particularly those who have suffered great loss to the tsunami (the IDPs). So far, the media (particularly the national media) have somehow missed the

gloomy conditions of the IDPs in their coverage. If “building a better Aceh even prior to tsunami” is to remain as a mission, balancing the concessions between ex GAM members, IDPs and conflict victims must be given the most serious of attention. Immediate provisions of shelters, basic needs, adequate water and sanitation, and economic provisions must be catered to speedily.

At the end of the day, **the whole reconstruction and peace building in Aceh should be manifestation of how Indonesia will re-define its sense of nationhood through democratic means and greater public participation.** No longer should military measures be used in governing the most western part of Indonesia, or anywhere in the archipelago. Reconciliation for Aceh is reconciliation for Indonesia.