

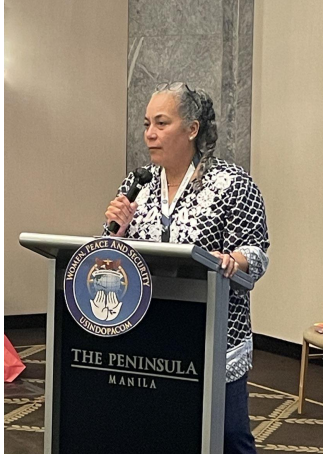
## **Pacific Forum and US Indo-Pacific Command convenes Southeast Asia Workshop on Women, Peace and Cybersecurity**

*Manila, Philippines – November 17, 2023*



Pacific Forum, in collaboration with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Office of Women, Peace & Security successfully concluded the regional workshop, "Forging US-Southeast Asia Cooperation on Women, Peace, and Cybersecurity," on November 15-16, 2023, at the Peninsula Manila, Makati City, Philippines. The two-day workshop supported those objectives outlined in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security (RPA WPS) related to cybersecurity.

The RPA WPS was developed under the auspices of the U.S.-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2022. Adopting a multi-stakeholder dialogue approach, the closed-door workshop explored four important and interrelated facets of cybersecurity: cyber defense, cyber diplomacy, cybercrime, and cyber capacity in the context of U.S.-Southeast Asia cooperation.



USINDOPACOM’s Women, Peace and Security Program Integrator, Amalia Hilliard, emphasized the urgency of integrating gender analysis into cyber policy and strategy during her opening remarks. “Understanding the role of gender in cyber can provide insights into how men, women, and gender-diverse individuals may experience and respond to cyber threats differently,” she said. She provided several examples, including technology-assisted gender-based violence and gendered disinformation, harassment, and abuse in online spaces. Reflecting upon USINDOPACOM’s engagements among partner nations, Hilliard noted the importance of collecting and analyzing sex-disaggregated data to inform gender-inclusive training, education, and decision-making in cybersecurity.

Pacific Forum’s Director of Cybersecurity and Critical Technologies, Mark Manantan, discussed the imperative to analyze Southeast Asia as a diverse region comprising a multitude of languages, cultures, and levels of digital maturity. Building on Pacific Forum’s ASEAN cyber capacity-building project, Manantan noted the role of inclusion in reinforcing gender analysis to include perspectives from minority groups and persons with disabilities.



In the plenary sessions on Cyber Defense, Cyber Diplomacy, Cybercrime, and Cyber Capacity, experts and practitioners from government, industry, academia, and civil society from the US and Southeast Asia exchanged views on implementing gender perspectives in concrete terms. Overall, experts endorsed the need for localized and context-specific approaches or strategies, comprehensive and gender-responsive protection and support mechanisms, multi-sectoral dialogues, and financial support to fully advance the women, peace, and cybersecurity agenda.





**Experts on Cyber Defense, Cyber Diplomacy, Cybercrime and Cyber Capacity (Photos L-R)**

**Kristi Govella, Ph.D.**, Director, Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs, University of Hawaii - Manoa;

**Agita Pasaribu**, Founder, Executive Director, Bullyid App-NMA Foundation; **Zarizana Abdul Aziz, Ph.D.**, Lawyer and Human Rights Advocate, Due Diligence Project; **Francesca Spidalieri**, International Affairs Specialist, U.S.

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency ; **Mark Manantan**, Pacific Forum's Director of Cybersecurity and Critical Technologies; **Amalia Hilliard**, Women, Peace and Security Program Integrator, USINDOPACOM; **Liza Garcia**, Director, Foundation for Media Alternatives; **Aisya Abdul Rahmad**, Independent Consultant and formerly Legal adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross; **Genalyn Macalinao**, Cyber Security Bureau, Department of Information and Communications Technology; **Christine Cariño** Director IV, Department of National Defense, Philippines; **Allan Cabanlong**, Regional Director for Southeast Asia, Global Forum on Cyber Expertise; **Lt. Col. Rodrigo Quinto**, Cyber Battalion, ASR Commanding Officer, Philippine Army; **Farlina Said**, Senior Analyst, International of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia; **Alexandra Håkansson Schmidt**, International Consultant, Governance, Peace, and Security, UN Women; **Allison Pytlak**, Cyber Program Lead, Stimson Center and; **Pham Vu Thien, Ph.D.**, Founder and Deputy Director, Center for Creative Initiatives in Health, and Population

As most countries in Southeast Asia are establishing their respective cyber defenses, experts urged defense planners and policymakers to leverage women's unique perspectives in addressing gender-specific cybersecurity concerns. They also argued that simply increasing the number of women in cybersecurity-related fields does not guarantee their meaningful participation nor does it automatically result in effective integration of gender perspectives. To remedy this misconception, the experts echoed the need to operationalize and institutionalize

gender perspectives in cyber defense to mitigate gender bias and disparities in women's recruitment and training.

Similarly, increasing women's proactive participation at the UN Group of Governmental Experts or UN Open-Ended Working Group on cybersecurity should require strengthening women's technical and negotiation skills. Foreign Affairs ministries and departments must adopt gender-responsive policies to mitigate the prevailing stereotypes in diplomatic processes and negotiations between men and women.



In Southeast Asia, women and young girls continue to suffer disproportionately as compared to men and young boys from online fraud and phishing scams. The proliferation of deep fakes due to generative AI have made women and girls even more vulnerable to cyber harassment and bullying. Due to the rapid evolution of cyber-related threats, experts stressed the need to reframe such concerns to be more encompassing.

Promoting inclusive growth in the cybersecurity workforce is a significant first step in addressing the myriad cybersecurity challenges in Southeast Asia. Although education and training opportunities are growing, structural barriers continue to prevent women from sustaining a viable career in the cybersecurity field over the long-term. To enhance cyber capacity, the



formation of women, peace, and cybersecurity advocates is key. Allyship will help women thrive in the workplace and ensure career longevity. Creating a community of women, peace and cybersecurity champions will help elevate awareness of women's credibility and distinct capabilities in the male-dominated field of cybersecurity.



The workshop's key outcomes contribute to ongoing initiatives promoting the integration of gender-responsive cybersecurity measures in the Indo-Pacific region. This is consistent with Pacific Forum and USINDPACOM's commitment to advancing actionable policy recommendations and sharing best practices for integrating WPS principles and a gender perspective into every aspect of defense and security.

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*Pacific Forum is a non-profit think tank fostering dialogue, cooperation, and policy shaping in the Indo-Pacific region. For more information, visit <https://pacforum.org/>.*

*About USINDOPACOM's Office of Women, Peace & Security:*

*USINDOPACOM's Office of Women, Peace & Security (WPS) mainstreams gender perspectives into theater plans, programs, and policies in order to enable the USINDOPACOM enterprise to develop inclusive security strategies that advance a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. For more information, visit <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/Women-Peace-and-Security/>*

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