Linking the Moro People with the rest of the world

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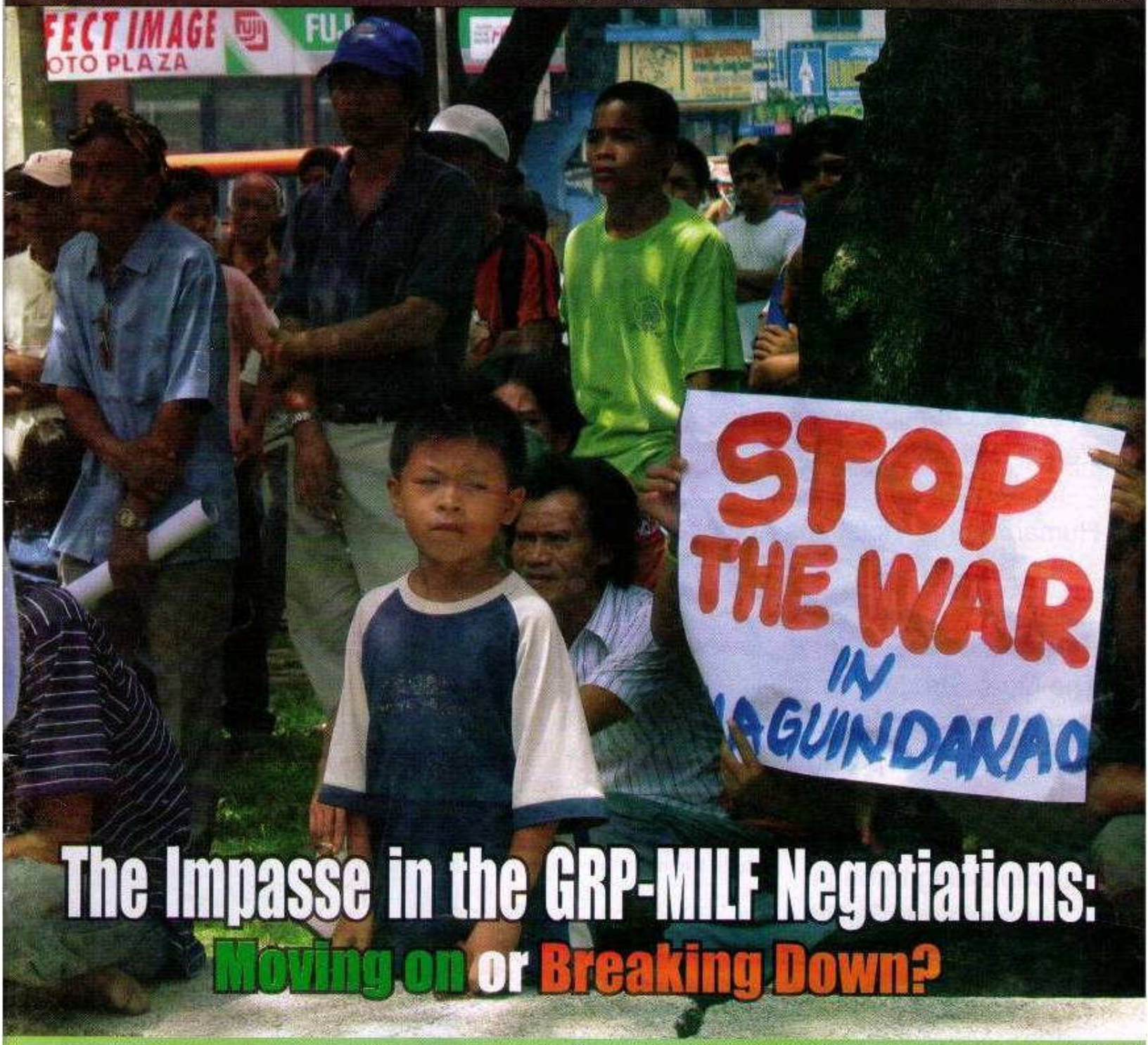

The Impasse in the GRP-MILF Negotiations: Moving on or Breaking Down?

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Will it result in a breakup?

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Editorial

We need peace now, more than ever

The present impasse in the peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is one issue that is worth the attention of the people in Mindanao, particularly the Bangsamoro. The way things are going on this time, we see two seemingly contrasting realities.

To the GRP, what is happening to the peace negotiations is just a minor misunderstanding and there is no need to worry about it. For some MILF leaders, they describe the situation as a mere breakdown that arise out of some disagreements on the way certain issues are being interpreted and but easy to patch up.

Meanwhile, the existing peace mechanisms established bilaterally by the GRP and MILF peace panels, such as the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), Local Monitoring Teams (LMT) and reinforced by the International Monitoring Team are still working. They fearlessly perform their sworn duties to sustain the peace and order, so that the gains of the peace negotiations will not be lost.

In Davao City and Compostela Valley Province, cases of summary killings, abductions and involuntary disappearances became rampant recently.

While in Barangay Poblacion, Banisilan, North Cotabato, Mayor Floro Allado and his escorts, without any provocation, fired at a group of Moro civilians aboard a cargo truck last November 2, 2006. Four persons were killed and five others were injured.

Allado, the trigger-happy mayor, was charged with cases of multiple murder and multiple frustrated murder by the relatives of the victims. He has been detained in the PNP Provincial Headquarters in Amas, Kidapawan City.

With all these circumstances, prolonging the impasse in the GRP-MILF peace talks will inevitably lead to a worst scenario, to the detriment of our people.

After failing for several times to make it to its self-imposed deadline in submitting its proposal on the territory of the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE), the GRP peace panel submitted a two-page letter-proposal to the MILF to let the talks move forward.

...prolonging the impasse in the GRP-MILF peace talks will inevitably lead to a worst scenario, to the detriment of our people.

On the other hand, looking closer on what is happening on the ground, we see some third parties – anti-peace as they are — who try to take advantage of the current impasse in the peace talks. These are the groups whose interests will best be served by ultimate collapse of the negotiation.

Among the prominent examples are the bombings in Tacurong, Sultan Kudarat Province and in Makilala, North Cotabato on October 10, 2006. Six persons were killed and some thirty-five others were injured.

Immediately, some government officials were quick on pointing accusing fingers to the MILF as the perpetrator of the bombings. The MILF denied the accusations.

Then, police authorities filed charges of multiple murder and multiple frustrated murder against MILF Chair Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and some local commanders.

When asked about the GRP's proposal, Mohaqher Iqbal, chair of the MILF peace panel, said "they just enlarged the ring". He did not elaborate.

We reiterate, prolonging the impasse is tantamount to prolonging the sufferings of our people. They have had enough of it already.

Both the GRP and the MILF, therefore, should explore all the possible means to break the impasse.

For every peace-loving individual, it pays to be more vigilant this time.

Everybody has a role to play to give peace a chance to reign in our land.

Breakdown of the GRP-MILF Negotiations

Will It Result in a Breakup?

According to the Malaysian facilitators, a deadlock in negotiations could lead to the untimely termination of the peace talks.

By Maulana M. Alonto

In the 13th Exploratory Talks held from September 6-7 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, between the MILF and GRP Panels, a snag developed, which has curtailed what would have been a 4-day deliberation (additional two days were reserved by the Malaysian facilitators if needed) on the remaining 'technical' matters that have to be sorted out before a memorandum of agreement on the ancestral domain aspect can be drafted and signed by both parties.

It is not the usual snag. As described by the Malaysian facilitators, it is a breakdown that could end in a breakup of the talks if no significant positive results are achieved to push the negotiations forward. Indeed, the seriousness of the situation is underscored by the fact that Malaysia, which has been brokering the talks since 2001 upon the imploration of the Arroyo regime, has threatened to terminate the negotiations and pull out the International Monitoring Team (IMT) from the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao.

The unresolved 'technical' matters that caused the snag pertain to the territorial strand of the ancestral domain aspect of the MILF-GRP Tripoli Agreement on Peace of June 2001. Both parties have already reached consensus at the technical working group level on the four strands of the ancestral domain aspect, namely: concept, governance, resources and territory. This consensus will form the framework within which the panels would be drafting the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain and thus put closure to the issue. Had the issue been settled, official negotiations, which until now remain suspended due to the Arroyo "All-Out War" in 2003, would have resumed and the final stage of the talks centered on the drawing of a political formula in the form of a political compact to end the conflict would have subsequently been inaugurated.

> The present breakdown could lead to a breakup. And in the event of a breakup, there will be dire consequences. Armed conflict could resume in an escalating manner never before experienced.

But when discussions focused on the nitty-gritty aspects of the territorial strand, a wall has emerged that prevents the expeditious resolution of these "technical' matters. The GRP panel, in the last three consecutive sessions of the exploratory talks devoted to these "technical' matters, had been stalling by claiming lack of mandate from its principal. The panels are now facing a deadlock that is an impediment to the progress of the peace process. In exasperation, the Malaysian facilitators threatened to scuttle the peace negotiations for being 'a waste of time and effort' and finally have set a deadline on September 30, 2006 for the GRP to come up with a packaged proposal on the issue of ancestral domain that would be acceptable to the MILF.

Whether this deadline could be met by the GRP Panel remains to be seen. Granting that the packaged proposal is submitted on time, the MILF still has to see whether such a packaged proposal is in accord with the consensus points and, of course, with the letter and spirit of the MILF-GRP Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001. In the words of the Malaysian facilitators, "the ball is now in the hands of the GRP Panel". The success or failure of the peace negotiations depends on whether or not the GRP Panel is fully equipped with the necessary mandate from its principal to meet these requirements.

The bottleneck remains in the territorial strand of the ancestral domain issue, an issue which is central to any political formula designed to resolve the conflict in Mindanao. Ancestral domain (*kawaris* in Maguindanao and *kawali* in Maranaw) is Homeland. Current negotiations revolve around restoring the Bangsamoro ancestral domain or homeland, or what is left of it, to its original autochthonous inhabitants — the Bangsamoro people. But even regarding this, what the GRP has already conceded in principle (consensus points), it is now hesitant to concede in practice. In the parting statement of Atty. Michael Mastura, a senior member of the MILF Panel, just before the negotiators separated in Kuala Lumpur: "*We are demanding for a homeland but what the GRP is willing to give us is merely a hometown.*"

Against this backdrop, there is indeed a big problem and if this is not resolved the entire peace process is in deep trouble. The present breakdown could lead to a breakup. And in the event of a breakup, there will be dire consequences. Armed conflict could resume in an escalating manner never before experienced.

The problem does not really lie with the members of the GRP panel. Secretary Silvestre Afable, Jr., chair of the GRP Panel, is perhaps the best team leader that the GRP has contributed in the peace negotiations with the MILF or with any other revolutionary group. His honesty and sincerity are beyond reproach. Even Brother Mohaqher Iqbal, chair of the MILF Panel, attests to Afable's gentlemanly character. Likewise, the members of his panel are all honorable individuals. But in peace negotiations, individual honesty and sincerity are not the decisive factors. Afable merely represents the government and it is the decision of his principal that Afable has to execute even if it is distasteful. As such, it is the principal - the GRP - that is actually building the wall — the 'lack of mandate' – even which Afable and his team find difficult to overcome and which prevents the parties in the negotiations from concluding an agreement.

From all indications, Afable's principal, the GRP, particularly the Arroyo regime, has not gone beyond its traditional reactionary mindset when it comes to dealing with the Bangsamoro people. Brother Iqbal stated it aptly when he said that the GRP cannot think 'out of the box'. This failure to think 'out of the box' has already resulted in the debacle that accompanied the MNLF-GRP peace negotiations in 1976 and in 1996. By insisting on solving the Mindanao problem within the framework of the Philippine constitution (the 'box'), the GRP had consigned to doom any chance of ending the conflict that has already taken tens of thousands of lives, not to mention the gargantuan political, economic, social and security problems it is causing the Philippine nation-state.

The problem with the GRP is that it has never learned its lessons from the MNLF experience. Confined to 'thinking within the box', it is attempting to apply the same techniques it applied to the MNLF on the MILF. But the MILF is *not* the MNLF. The MILF is negotiating not for the MILF but for the Bangsamoro people and to address the root cause of the conflict in Mindanao through a peaceful and just negotiated political settlement. This being so, it has categorically rejected the proposition, as a pre-condition for negotiations, that peace talks with the GRP should fall within the ambit of the Philippine constitution. The MILF has drawn lessons from the MNLF experience; thus, it is avoiding falling into the same hole twice, to paraphrase the hadith (saying) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

The GRP, on the other hand, remains intransigent and incorrigible. It is not that the GRP does not understand the nature of the Mindanao problem; the truth is that it *refuses* to understand the nature of the problem and persists on applying a failed and outdated counter-insurgency approach and formula which, instead of solving it, are prolonging the conflict, perhaps even extending it into the next generations.

The Mindanao conflict can never be divorced from its historical context. The present struggle of the Bangsamoro people today is a sequel to and therefore a continuation of the struggle of the Bangsamoro nation five centuries ago against foreign colonialism and imperialism. It is a just struggle for national emancipation moored in the right of a people to determine their future and live a life of

peace according to their faith in an environment of freedom.

This struggle for the right of self determination has predated the establishment of the Philippine republic in 1946 (which incorporated the Bangsamoro homeland without the plebiscitary consent of its people) and so has predated the Filipino constitutions written during the American colonial period (1935), the martial law regime of Ferdinand Marcos (1972) and the so-called revolutionary government of Cory Aquino (1986). The just solution to this nagging problem in Mindanao, therefore, cannot be found in the present constitution of the Philippine Republic or in its previous constitutions for that matter; on the contrary, in fact, Philippine constitutions are written testaments to the unjust colonization of the Bangsamoro homeland. These are merely documents crafted by fallible mortals that made legal and sacrosanct an otherwise illegal and immoral act of arbitrary annexation of the Bangsamoro nation and homeland. To address the problem, thus, is to address its roots, and this would need a strong political will on the part of whoever is in Malacañang as well as all Filipino leaders in government. This would require, in short, thinking 'out of the box'.

Charles de Gaulle, with strong political will, did it in 1962 when he granted independence to Algeria even when he was confronted by the revolt of the French army and French colonial settlers who considered Algeria a part of France and were therefore violently opposed to Algerian independence. Attempts were made by the rightist French military and *colon* (French settlers) to overthrow de Gaulle, even assassinate him. But with steeled determination de Gaulle ended French colonialism in Algeria for which later generations of French and Algerians were to thank and remember him for all times.

Now is the time for the GRP leaders to equip themselves with a strong political will, like de Gaulle, to be able to solve this problem in Mindanao on the basis of justice. The opportunity to do so may not present itself again. They have to think outside of the 'box'. And they have to stop resorting to foul means like subverting the MILF through 'parallel negotiations' (enticing MILF leaders and military commanders to surrender) that undermine the Kuala Lumpur negotiations, the Malaysian facilitators, and the MILF itself.

These are acts of betrayal against the peace process that will never solve the conflict. For even assuming that all the Moro revolutionary fronts and guerilla groups today capitulate, there will always be Bangsamoros from the new generations that would continue the revolutionary struggle and jihad of the Bangsamoro people and nation unless and until their legitimate grievances are redressed and justice is served. Given the recent developments in the global scene, the next generation of Bangsamoro freedom fighters may not be inclined to the kind of peace negotiations that we are engaged in today.

Indeed, with the present breakdown in the peace negotiations, the ball has passed on to the hands of the GRP. The kind of ballgame that the GRP plays in the couple weeks to come will determine whether the talks will continue or end in a breakup. In a breakup, there is really no choice but to eventually end the contest through war. It would be catastrophic for a government to confront many enemies, debilitated by internal decay and corruption and floundering in a sea of economic and political uncertainty.

Source: (http://www.luwaran.com)

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Letter to the Editors

A Reader's View on the Stalled Peace Talks

The Philippine government must not feel that it is losing anything because the Bangsamoro territories should have never been part of this thing they call the Philippine republic. It is about time that they should stop thinking that the Bangsamoro areas are part of the Philippines. The truth of the matter is that these areas have been immorally and illegally annexed without the consent of the people of these areas. They are not losing anything at all. Nothing that is theirs is being taken away from them. What the people of the Bangsamoro areas simply want is to be left alone to live the way they want to live, away from the rottenness that this thing they call the Philippine republic is slowly dying of. The Regalian Doctrine does not apply because the Bangsamoro areas have not been truly under the rule of Spain nor by America.

David Martinez wrote in his book, *A Country Of our Own*: "However discreetly and diplomatically, most of our political and religious leaders privately encouraged and later publicly applauded the secession of Catholic East Timor from Muslim Indonesia. This very same leadership, however, has no compunction about resorting to 'all means necessary,' including brute military force, to ensure that a Muslim homeland never secedes from a Catholic Philippines. This is classic duplicity—the height of hypocrisy—but the pagan heart of our "Christian" leadership remains unmoved. They will continue to worship the god of territorial integrity no matter how horrific the cost of this now intractable conflict, no matter how many lives, Muslim and non-Muslim, innocent or otherwise, are sacrificed on their unholy altar."

Today there is a persistent sinister plot to denigrate the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), an established Bangsamoro revolutionary organization that has existed since the '80s and that has recently received an overwhelming fresh endorsement from the Bangsamoro people in May of 2005, as their rightful champion, voice and representative. Again and again, it is being accused of having linkages with terror groups such as the Abu Sayyaf and the Jema-a Islamiah. Obviously this is an attempt to demolish the moral ground on which the MILF stands vis-à-vis the Peace Negotiation.

My appeal to the GRP is that for once let us be honest and sincere in our quest for a just and lasting solution to the Bangsamoro problem. We can never succeed in building strong enough bridges and trust enough to make us live together in peace and harmony if we cannot be truthful enough to each other. We must have the will to make truth and justice prevail. We must have the will to stand by our words, our commitments, our agreements. Then and only then can we cease to see each other as enemies and start embracing each other as friends.

As Bangsamoros, we must constantly remind ourselves of the lurking danger of people, parties or even outside forces seeking to divide us and to destroy us so that they can feast on our resources and perpetuate the impoverishment and enslavement of our people. Let us not be swayed by those who would like to keep Mindanao in a perpetual state of war because this is the way they maintain power and control of our resources and violate human rights with impunity. Let us make sure that we are not used as tools or instruments by those who plan to plunder our God-given patrimony and violate our rights to live as a free and independent nation.

Let us exert our utmost effort to resolve our conflicts and differences in the most democratic and non-violent manner possible so that we may start development that is in accordance with our own concepts, principles and values in preparation for our future generations. Let us save our children from the racism, tribalism, bias, greed, corruption, lust for power, moral decadence and neo-colonialism that have fanned the fires of war up to this time. And when we talk of development it should also be one that would take into consideration the carrying capacity of the environment and one that allows environmental resource regeneration and conservation. So far, the developmental models pursued by the US, Europe and even Japan and China place too much strain on global environmental resources.

There is a strong surge of opinion that it is wrong to impose the condition that a peace agreement has to be in place before development shall be supported. It is argued that development activities would in fact encourage and set the stage for a peace pact to be signed.

We harbor no ill-feelings against the Filipinos. Nor do we hate the Filipino soldiers. They are not our enemies. But we have to save and protect the Bangsamoro from oppression and injustice perpetrated by a neo-colonial Filipino regime.

Breaking the standoff in the GRP-MILF peace talks:

Human Security is the main priority

When the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) started talking peace with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) on January 7, 1997, the former pushed for a single-point agendum for the peace negotiations, i.e., "How to solve the 'Bangsamoro Problem.'"

Accordingly, there was a "gentlemen's agreement" between the negotiating parties that the MILF would not bring out the issue of "independence" and the government the issue of "constitution, sovereignty and territorial integrity" as part of confidence-building measures in the peace talks.

As far as the Bangsamoro people is concerned, it is clear that the root cause of the Bangsamoro problem is the continued neo-colonial rule of the Philippine state over what they consider as their Bangsamoro Homeland. Finding a just, negotiated political and lasting solution to this problem has become the overriding agenda in the GRP-MILF Peace Talks, with the end in view of establishing a system of life and governance suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro people. As a sign of its sincerity and desire to move the peace process forward, the MILF has never raised the issue of independence as an agenda in its peace negotiations with the GRP.

Since 1997, the parties have already signed a number of peace agreements, joint communiqués/statements and aide-memoirs, among others. In all those documents, nowhere can one find such words and phrases as independence, constitutional process or sovereignty and territorial integrity. There were, however, some references to international human rights laws as well as international humanitarian laws that reaffirmed the fundamental rights of the Bangsamoro people to determine their own future and political status.

However, during the 13th Exploratory Talks held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia last September 6-7, 2006, the peace panels have failed to reach an agreement on the limitations of territory of the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) due to the constitutional processes being invoked by the GRP. While the MILF was negotiating for the inclusion of more that 3,000 barangays outside of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the GRP offered only a total of 613 whose inclusion, it demands, still has to be subjected to "constitutional process."

The MILF rejected the said government offer, pointing out that "it does not want to repeat the failure of the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement (FPA) of September 2, 1996". The MNLF is of the belief that until now the government is yet to fully deliver its commitment on the said Agreement.

On the other hand, the government stands firm on its position that the existing ARMM cannot be expanded unless it goes

through a constitutional process, arguing that its hands are tied to the constitution in any agreement it has to enter into with the MILF.

With the current deadlock, and with many among us fearing the possible break-up of the talks, we in the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS) appeal to both the GRP and MILF panels to exert all efforts in finding a creative and resourceful way to push the talks to its final resolution. We call on the government, on one hand, to give preference to *human security* as the primordial concern rather than the *state security* and to refrain from invoking the Constitution as the sole framework in concluding a peace agreement with the MILF. Human beings are of far greater value than the State and the Constitution; the people's integrity more important than territories. The MILF, on the other hand, can reach a consensus on some of the territories outside of the 613 barangays and the ARMM as offered by the government, but hold it in abeyance in transitional status to give itself ample time to show the viability of a Bangsamoro-led society. In other words, *we would like to see the peace process continue beyond the signing of any political agreement.*

There is always a way and the right way. The old way and the new way of negotiating employed by the government are not working. Getting out of the constitutional framework and exploring a more creative and human security-based means is the right way out. To this, the parties must examine successful conflict resolution formula being applied in other countries or in the international community, as models in resolving the impasse.

Are we now bracing for the worse scenarios? War is always a threat to human security. There are no winners but only losers in war.

We, therefore, urge the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to exercise a strong political will to resolve the impasse and to be more flexible in its position in the current peace talks.

Signed in Cotabato City this 30th day of September 2006.

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The Tacub Massacre Revisited

By Taher G. Solaiman

Thirty-five years have passed since the infamous Tacub Massacre on November 22, 1971. Yet, the memory of the barbarous killing of sixty Moro Maranaos that day still remain fresh in the minds of the Bangsamoro people.

Why and how did it happen?

The national election was held on November 8, 1971. But due to the harassments of the dreaded ILAGA (see box), many Moro voters in Mindanao were not able to cast their votes. Many of them were in the evacuation centers then. A special election had to be set on November 22.

The ILAGA Terror Gang

The ILAGA was a terror gang backed by Philippine government officials, both civilian and military. Its members, composed mainly of Ilongos, a tribe in the Visayas Island, were notorious in sowing terror among the Moro populace in Mindanao particularly in the early 70's. They massacred innocent Moro civilians and looted their properties. Their signature was the severing of the ears of their victims.

Ilaga is a Visayan vernacular that means rat. Some documents would reveal later, however, that ILAGA was actually an acronym for Ilongo Land Grabbers' Association.

In his *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine*

See **TACUB** ... page 20

Kawagib says HR Violations against Bangsamoro on the Rise

A Moro human rights organization based in Cotabato City has expressed alarm over the increasing cases of human rights violations in Moro areas lately.

Kagawib, which is also one of the conveners of the newly-formed Mindanao Interfaith Human Rights Advocates (MIHRA), is referring to the series of abductions in Maguindanao, especially during the month of August, and the displacements in Moro communities caused by sporadic armed clashes between government forces and Moro rebel groups.

The group cited the case of Kusain Abedin, 36 years old, who was abducted by combined elements of the Task Force Tugis, Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG-ARMM) and the Military Intelligence Group (MIG) on August 3, 2006, about 6:30 pm, at the Weena bus terminal in Cotabato City.

The government troops brought and detained Abedin, an officer of the United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD), at the headquarters of the Task Force Tugis in PC Hill. He was released 27 hours later for lack of evidence.

The government troops tried to link Abedin to the so-called terrorist group Jama'ah Islamiya.
Meanwhile, on August 27, 2006, some elements of the Philippine Army's 603rd infantry brigade, CIDG-ARMM and the MIG arrested without a warrant Radzak Macarimbang, 42; Wahab Ramalan, 32; and Sammy Gampong, 26, in Polloc Port, Parang, Maguindanao.
The three, all residents of Matanog, Maguindanao, were already aboard the Super Ferry vessel bound for Manila when the soldiers arrested them.

The soldiers alleged that they the arrested the trio on suspicion that they were bombers.
Macarimbang, a former barangay captain of Sapad, Matanog, Maguindanao, claimed he was a businessman; Ramalan was supposed to fetch his niece who was going home from overseas, while Gampong was going to Manila in search of a job.

Kagawib further claims it has documented 132 cases of illegal arrests perpetrated by state forces against the Moro people since 2001. Besides, 442,000 persons were internally displaced by military operations in North Cotabato, Maguindanao Lanao del Sur and Sulu in the same span of time, the group says.

During the recent armed clashes between the MILF and members of the Civilian Volunteers Organization (CVO) that started last June 28, 2006 in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, Kagawib put the total of persons displaced and number of houses burned at 30,000 and 200, respectively.

Updates on Civil Society Organizations

United Youth for Peace and Development (UNYPAD), in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is currently implementing a project on the capability-building of the youth in affected communities, namely in Midsayap and Guindulungan.

Starting December 2005 until February 2006, UNYPAD is holding trainings on youth leadership and organization, simultaneously with community forums in Nabalawag and Mudseng in Midsayap and Barangays Muti and Kalumamis in Guindulungan.

Apart from youth leadership and organization, skill-enhancement trainings in electronics, food processing, carpentry and woodworks, sustainable agriculture and soap processing will be held for the In- and Out-of-School youth. Target number of participants is limited to 20 per barangay.

Human rights advocacy group launched

COTABATO CITY — A group of human rights advocates in Cotabato City launched the Mindanao Interfaith for Human Rights Advocacy (MIHRA) on September 9, 2006 at the Community Training and Resource Center, this city. MIHRA, which aims to educate the communities on their basic rights, is composed of religious groups, lawyers, civil society and human rights workers.

As an initial activity of its human rights education program, the group conducted a seminar-workshop on human rights advocacy even before the proper launching of the program itself.

"The alliance will serve as a quick response team if there are human rights violations in Cotabato City," said Atty. Anwar Malang of the Union of People's Lawyer in Mindanao (UPLM) who was also elected as MIHRA spokesperson.

Sittie Rajabia Sundang, spokesperson of the Kawagib, a Moro human rights group, stressed that "the alarming number of human rights violations in the country made the advocates decide to form an alliance that would help address the current situation."

One of the convenors, Sr. Helen Labis, OND, claimed that although the newly formed alliance cannot totally eradicate the human rights violations in the country, "at least through this effort we could help lessen the number of human rights violations."

Four Moro men became victims of abduction by the Philippine military in Central Mindanao in the month of August, 2006.

Kawagib, a Moro human rights organization based in this city and one of the convenors of MIHRA, has documented 132 cases of illegal arrest perpetrated by state forces against the Moro people since 2001. It further claimed that a total of 442,000 persons were internally displaced by military operations in North Cotabato, Maguindanao Lanao del Sur and Sulu in the same span of time.

During the recent armed clashes between the MILF and members of the Civilian Volunteers' Organization (CVO) that started last June 28, 2006 in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, at least 30,000 persons were displaced and 200 houses burned based on Kagawib records. (Sittie Sundang/Taher G. Solaiman)

TFDP condemns abductions of Moro individuals in Mindanao

The Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) condemned cases of abduction and disappearance that happened recently in Southern Mindanao and victimized mostly Moro non-combatants.

In a press statement it released last October 31, the TFPD recalled that on August 28, 2006 at 10:00 a. m., three alleged members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), were abducted and disappeared near a stall of used clothing *(ukay-ukay)*, along Lizada Boulevard, Davao City. The victims were identified as Ali Barabato, 29 years old; Ismael Sarip, 29 and Datu Abubakar, 36.

According to TFDP, on August 31, the dead body of Barabato was recovered along the shoreline of Barangay Aumbay, Island Garden City of Samal, Davao del Norte. Both hands of the victim were tied on his back with tie wire. His body and his legs were also wrapped with it."

The body of the victim bore torture marks and his head was pierced with bullet wounds. Sarip and Abubakar are still missing up to this time.

The TFDP further disclosed the following cases of abduction and disappearance:
On October 19, 2006 at 10:45 a. m., Cadir Malaydan, a Kalagan Moro tribal leader, was abducted and disappeared in Purok 1, Barangay Poblacion, Monkayo, Compostela Valley Province, about 75-150 meters away from two adjacent police outposts.

While on October 22, 2006, a former member of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), was abducted inside

his residence in Barangay Tigatto, Buhangin District, Davao City at midnight. The victim was Edgar Sabdula, 36 and married with two children.

Then, on October 24, 2006, an Arabic teacher, Ustadz Habib "Sonny" Darupo, 29, was abducted and disappeared at 4:00 p. m. near the public market in Poblacion, Banaybanay, Davao Oriental. On October 25, 2006 at 11 a. m., the victim was freed and was able to return home with some signs of torture.

In all the incidents earlier mentioned, the victims described their abductors as "wearing bonnets, armed with assorted weapons and onboard L-300 vans with tinted windows."

Rita Melecio of the TFDP claimed that "there are still unreported cases of abductions and those whose victims' relatives do not want to be published for fear and sense of hopelessness. How many are yet to be arrested and how many still are on the list?"

"Our Muslim brothers continue to bear the stigma of being regarded as the usual suspects every time there is a perceived act of terrorism. This has to end," she stressed.

The TFDP urged "the concerned government agencies to conduct immediate and impartial investigation regarding these cases so that the perpetrators will be brought to justice. This alarming trend if left unresolved will lead to the breakdown of the rule of law and complete disregard of human rights." ***(Taher G. Solaiman)***

"Tutorials in Conflict Analysis" Series Launched by KFI

Kadtuntaya Foundation, Inc. (KFI) has recenly started a training series called "Tutorials in Conflict Analysis", sponsored by the German Development Service (DED). The Tutorials are divided into five different series, each introducing different tools and methods for conflict analysis, inclucating it in designing interventions and strategy-building.

Tutorials in Conflict Analysis Series 1 included tools such as Stages of Conflict, Timeline and Conflict Mapping. Series 2, which will take place on 13 December 2006 at the KFI Community Training and Resource Center, will introduce methods such as Conflict Tree, Conflict Arena, Intervention Design using Conflict Pyramid+Stages and the Do-No-Harm Analysis.

KFI staff mapping the conflict in Carmen using clay & Christmas balls.

These Tutorials were designed and are conducted by Pressia Arifin, a Specialist for Conflict Management and Peacebuilding sent by the German Development Service (DED) to the KFI. Participants are mostly KFI Staff but Series 2 was opened to the International Monitoring Team (IMT) and other civil society organizations.

The trainings are part of KFIs Peacebuilding Program, which includes other components such as advocacy and lobbying, research, community-level peacekeeping and advocacy.

For the Training component, KFI is now offering a number of services to the local communities and members of civil society organizations such as training in conflict management, conflict analysis, non-violent communication, teambuilding among many others.

In 2007, KFI will launch training manuals adapted to the Mindanao context, which is user-friendly especially to grassroots communities, who are seen to multiply the trainings in their own area.

Requests for training and participation could be made by e-mail at Pressia.Arifin@web.de

Peace and Conflict Journalism for Mindanao

The Participants to the Peace and Conflict Journalism held at the Malasag Eco-Tourism Village in Cugman, Cagayan de Oro on November 17-20, 2006.

Recognizing the strong influence of the journalists on how the events in Mindanao are seen, a two-part course on Peace and Conflict Journalism was introduced to some thirty journalists and writers coming from different parts of Mindanao.

First course of the training was held on November 17 – 20, 2006 at the Malasag Eco-Tourism Village in Cugman, Cagayan de Oro.

The training was conducted by the Peace and Conflict Journalism Network in coordination with the InWent (Capacity Building International, Germany). PECOJON is an international network of journalists who work in, with, and about conflict.

PECOJON sees the need for journalists who reports on conflict to be more responsible because journalists could strongly affect the direction of events. With this, the journalists can avoid themselves from being part of the conflict.

The resource person, Antonia Koop, a German Journalist and filmmaker, gave emphasis on doing constructive conflict reporting highlighting on who are the real victims in any conflict and how it may be addressed.

Being an institution dealing with peace and conflict transformation, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society has sent its Research and Publication Officer Tarhata Sambutuan to the training to gain knowledge on reporting the peace initiatives and conflict transformation efforts.

The second part of the training will be conducted after six months to allow time for the participants to put into practice the knowledge they earned from the training.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST THE BANGSAMORO

By Sittie Rajabia Sundang

Justice must prevail for all the vicitms of the all-out wars in Mindanao.

The list of human rights violations perpetrated by the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo against the Bangsamoro is rather long. However, because it disguises itself as pursuit operations against international and local terrorists, the abuses of the Arroyo administration, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) are covered and sometimes hailed as the doing the right action to "curb" terrorism.

The public should know that beyond every military action of the AFP, hundreds of innocent Moro lives are lost. Thousands of Moro people are being displaced from their ancestral land, their homes burned to the ground, their farmlands, crops and livelihood destroyed, as tons of bombs from OV-10 fighter planes were dropped in the provinces of Basilan, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato and Sulu.

In a rough estimate of the violations that the Arroyo administration has committed since 2001, KAWAGIB, a Moro human rights organization, presents the following list based on the reports from different organizations providing legal and other support services to Moro victims:

Based on the data available, the three recent all-out wars against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato and Sulu resulted to the killing of 191 civilians. There were 128 cases of illegal arrests and detention for alleged Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and MILF members. Besides, some 442,000 persons fled from their homes and millions worth of properties, farmlands and livelihood destroyed due to series of military operations.

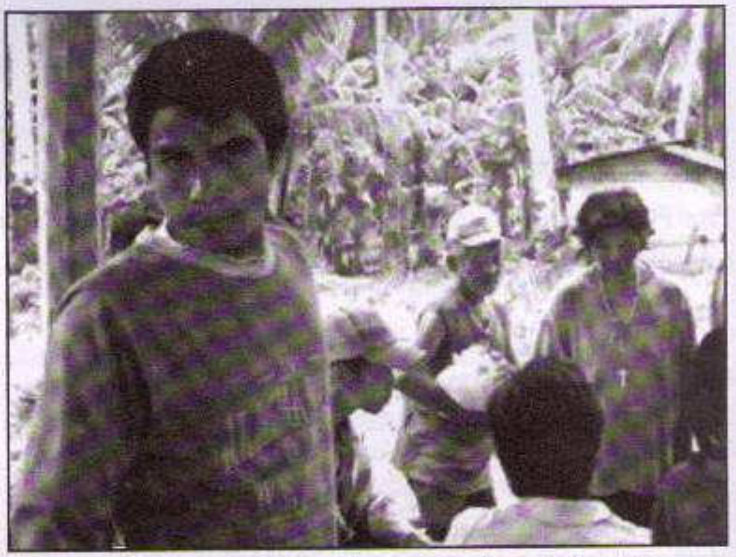
Two-faced peace offer and the Moro terrorist hype

On her first year of presidency brought about by the people's ouster of former President Joseph Estrada, Arroyo told those who joined the uprising that she would place peace efforts as the priority of her administration. She then opened the peace negotiations with the MILF.

Yet, to resolve the series of kidnapping cases of foreigners by the ASG, Arroyo declared Basilan, known as an Abu Sayyaf lair, under "state of lawlessness". She legitimized indiscriminate and warrantless arrests against male residents of Basilan, Sulu and Zamboanga City. Eventually, government troops arrested some five hundred Moro men. Government authorities later released half of that number for lack of evidence.

In year 2001, Arroyo allied with US President George Bush in his "war against terror". She offered Basilan and Sulu as sites for US-RP joint military exercises aimed at fighting terrorism.

In 2002, Moro families fled from their communities, as their homes turned into combat zones. Those who remained in their respective communities became vulnerable to military attacks, such as what happened to a Moro farmer, who was shot by an American soldier in a covert combat operation that was part of the RP-US Balikatan joint military exercises. The government troops later accused and detained him as a member of the ASG to justify the shooting.



Every Bangsamoro has become vulnerable to human rights violation.

In Sulu, the military continued pounding on MNLF areas on the pretext of running after ASG members. This resulted to the killing of seven MNLF commanders in Talipao municipality. This prompted all MNLF commanders to go back to their areas of control and defend their positions.

As it turned out, the military zeroed in their attacks against the forces of the MNLF led by then Autonomous Region

Illegal arrests have been rampant since the government waged war against terrorism.

in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Regional Governor Nur Misuari.

Then, the Arroyo administration arrested and detained MNLF Chair Misuari, a signatory to the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. His loyal army and sympathizers bore the brunt of the AFP Southern Command's military operations.

In year 2003, under the pretext of pursuing local bandits magnified as international terrorists, the generals of Arroyo ordered for an all-out war in Buliok, Pikit, North Cotabato, believed to have become the central camp of the MILF after the downfall of Camp Abubakar during President Estrada's all-out war in 2000. It caused the displacement of 78,237 families or more than 400,000 individuals from Pikit, North Cotabato; Pagalungan and Datu Montawal in Maguindanao.

That same year, bombs exploded in different cities of Mindanao. AFP reports that MILF bombed Davao City in retaliation for the all-out war in Buliok. President Arroyo ordered manhunt operations against the MILF leadership, while local police in Davao City arrested more than 200 men whom they accused as MILF bombers. Moreover, thirty-two documented cases of "mysterious bombings" in Mindanao are not yet resolved.

In 2004, President Arroyo again opened the peace negotiations with the MILF because of the then upcoming national elections. However, she assented to intelligence reports that the Balik-Islam (Islamic revert) movement is the launching pad of terrorist bombing activities in Mindanao and Manila.

The national police abducted six Islamic reverts in Manila. When the families of the victims exposed the incident to the media, the police exposed them in public as bombers.

Meanwhile, after rigging the national elections and getting a million votes from the Moro voters in the ARMM, Arroyo gave the Army's 6th Infantry Division a leeway to attack MILF areas in the municipalities of Guindulungan and Talayan in Maguindanao despite existing arms truce and the presence of the International Monitoring Team (IMT). Again, the pretext used for this military action was the alleged presence of the ASG terrorists and the Southeast Asian terrorist group, Jemaah Islamiya. This continued until the first quarter and the second half of the year 2005.

There were two highlights in Arroyo's militarist agenda against the Moro people that year – the Padiwan Massacre and the police and military assault against Muslim detainees in Camp Bagong Diwa.

On February 1, 2005, the AFP's 53rd infantry battalion massacred a family in Maimbong, Sulu. They reported to the public that the victims were ASG terrorists. However, in the national fact-finding mission and congressional inquiry that followed, the testimony of the three siblings who survived the massacre exposed the militarist agenda of the military in Sulu.

Civilians in MNLF communities in Sulu and unarmed MNLF relatives became the common targets when the AFP launched a massive operation. Marines, Navy Rangers and even US-trained Light Reaction Company were deployed. The said military action aimed at pulverizing the MNLF commanders loyal to Misuari. This was in retaliation to the MNLF attacks on AFP detachments that claimed the lives of their fellow soldiers and commanders.

Ten months later, the AFP again launched massive operations on November even as they claimed that they were in hot pursuit against the Abu Sayyaf terrorists. Their

"There were two highlights in Arroyo's militarist agenda against the Moro people that year – the Padiwan Massacre and the police and military assault against Muslim detainees in Camp Bagong Diwa."

bombs and guns, however, were directed towards MNLF areas that prompted retaliations from the MNLF.

On January 28, 2005, eleven residents of Busbos, Jolo suffered from multiple gunshot wounds when two unidentified masked men aboard two motorcycles sprayed bullets on a mosque and houses nearby along Lambayoong Street that connects Patikul and Jolo municipalities.

A day after the said strafing incident in Jolo, a father and his four-year old son were reportedly killed in a blast in Patikul, Sulu. On February 1, 2005, a mortar shell hit a community that destroyed some properties in the same area.

In March 2005, President Arroyo did not heed the cries of the families of the innocent inmates massacred at Camp Bagong Diwa and instead applauded butchers like General Angelo Reyes for the killing of 26 Moro detainees who were used as human shields by the real ASG detainees who held hostage a police officer and a prison guard.

Last February 2-3, 2006, it came out in a congressional inquiry headed by Bayan Muna Representatives Satur Ocampo and Joel Virador, of the House Committee on Peace, Unity and Reconciliation, that the civilians witnessed that US troops joined the Filipino soldiers in November 11, 2005 military operations against the MNLF in Sulu.

The reported incidents showed how fragile was the peace situation in Sulu as the victims were non-combatants and

> "...beyond every military action of the AFP, hundreds of innocent Moro lives are lost."

this could aggravate hatred among the civilians towards the military.

Once again, we become witness to the failure of the Philippine government to keep its promise of peace in war-torn Mindanao. While pushing for an immediate final peace agreement to come up between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MILF, the administration of Arroyo is violating the 1996 Final Peace Agreement that the GRP inked with the MNLF by ordering an all-out war against the latter.

Arroyo's tactics against the Bangsamoro is no stranger to us. Just like her predecessor, Joseph Estrada, she, too, used the Moro people to catapult her sagging popularity. We were used as cannon fodders in her all-out war policy in Mindanao. We would become samples for the implementation of the National ID System, and she used the "Moro terrorist" scare to help bolster support for the passing of the Anti-Terrorism Bill.

As victims of all-out war and US war on terror campaigns, we have all the right to call for this callous and insensitive President to step down. We deserve justice for all the militarist policies that she has ordered against us – the incessant indiscriminate and warrantless arrests of Moro men accused of being terrorists, the bombings in our communities and the discriminatory way her administration has treated our people by tagging us terrorists as well as the imposition of ID system on Moro communities.

Arroyo dangles a peace agreement in front of the MILF in her left hand and on the other one orders the AFP to intensify its anti-terror drive in our communities. A president who boasts of the guns, bombs and military equipment she gets from the US government in exchange for providing the US troops areas in Mindanao that would serve as their training grounds and launching pads for their wars of aggression.

President Arroyo is no Peace Maker

Her penchant for solving crisis purely through military solutions is very apparent. President Arroyo is known in coddling and giving commendations to generals who have records of human rights violations against the Moro people such as Reyes who was responsible for the all-out war in 2000 and the bombing of Pikit and Liguasan Marsh in 2003.

Her incessant drive for legislators to pass the Anti-Terrorism Bill is sowing fear among the Moro communities. Even without the law, the Moro people fall victim to the anti-terror drive of the military and the police for being the usual suspects and terrorist look-alikes. Raids in the communities and abduction of suspected sympathizers and members of US government-listed terrorists abound. Terrorist bombings in the cities that killed civilians are being pinned down on Moro revolutionary groups, such as the MILF and the MNLF. How much more when the Anti-Terrorism Bill shall have been passed into law?

The bill defines what constitutes terrorism and terrorist acts. Hence, there is a probability that the Moro revolutionary struggle of the MNLF and the MILF might fall into that category. The bill excludes the destructive military operations and human rights violations committed by the AFP against the Moro people, such as the ceaseless bombardments of Moro areas, arbitrary

arrests, illegal detention of Moro fall guys and saturation drives in Moro communities.

In urban areas, Moro residents are forced to wear IDs, a policy that further discriminates and enjoins other groups to discriminate the Moro people from the Filipino majority by labeling them as terrorists.

We call for the sincere resolution to the problems in the Bangsamoro land. Not the mere just cosmetic solutions that do not resolve the history of injustice and oppression of the Moro people by the Philippine government. We call for the halt to the military operations in our communities, a stop to the indiscriminate arrests of our Moro brothers and provide a sincere resolution to the conflict in Mindanao.

We hope that the generals who have ordered the killing of our brothers and sisters be made responsible for their militarist judgments instead of earning promotions and medals for the all-out wars and crackdowns they have led.

The 2004 election would tell us that Arroyo had to cheat her way in Moro areas because she knew that the Moro people would never vote for her. This time, she needed to lie again to the Moro people to "protect" her position in Malacañang.

"Arroyo's tactics against the Bangsamoro is no stranger to us. Just like her predecessor, Joseph Estrada, she, too, used the Moro people to catapult her sagging popularity."

We, the united voice of the Bangsamoro, coming from different Moro tribes, stand united with the Filipino people in calling for Arroyo's ouster. There is no way that the Bangsamoro will forgive her for her crimes against our people. Justice must prevail for all the victims of the all-out wars in Mindanao.

***Editor's note: The views stated in here are the personal views of the author and not necessarily of the Consortium.*

CORDAID and Venture for Fund Raising hold 3-day Advance Fund Raising Course in Tagaytay

A 3-day Advance Fund Raising Course was held on 14-16 November 2006 at the PHINMA Training Center in Tagaytay City, Batangas for various civil society organizations to develop the skills of the participants and ensure their effectiveness in the pursuit of fund raising activities.

The primary purpose of the said fund raising course was to educate the participants on the reality of development works in the Philippines, the present trends and perspectives of funding donors in forging partnership with non-government organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations (CSOs). This also included the building of knowledge about the concept, vision, mission and goal of funds and the 10 fundamentals of fund raising.

A Basic Fund Raising Course to prepare the participants for the advance course was held on 9-12 August 2006 at the same venue.

To nurture its capability for self-sustenance, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS) sent its Acting Secretary-General and Program Coordinator Sammy P. Maulana and Council General Treasurer Mohammad Ali "Ferrer" Marcaban to attend the said course.

ASG Maulana, accordingly, has observed that some NGOs and other CSOs failed to sustain their operations due to dependency on their funding partners. He said that the failure of some NGOs and other CSOs to sustain their operations was due to their inability to recognize and appreciate the importance of venturing fund raising as vehicle for self-reliance.

Among the highlights of the fund raising course was the featuring of some best practices or success stories of the three selected Cordaid partners like the Interface Development Intervention, Inc. (IDIS), the SIA Initiatives in Mindanao Convergence and Regional Development (SIMCARD) and the CBCS and the case studies made on the programs and services of the CRIBS Philippines, Inc.

Going Back

With the Teduray culture slowly phased out by modernization, Barangay Pandan rewinds the new generation to the old traditions.

By Pressia Arifin

The Teduray pre-schoolers before their performance of a traditional dance.

Barangay Pandan, South Upi – Like most ethnic groups around the Philippines today, the Tedurays have adapted to the modern world, exchanging the old tools for the new ones, donning city garments and shedding their traditional costumes, teaching mainstream education to children in English and Tagalog. The new generation of the Tedurays hardly know their old tradition and practices because of their adaptation to the trends of the lowlands.

Jenelyn Intar, a pre-school teacher in the kindergarten built by Stiftung fuer Kinder in 1998 for the indigenous Tedurays, expressed her lack of knowledge in the old customs that were once practiced by her grandparents. Although she realizes the importance of the Teduray culture, she was not trained to include such elements in her lesson plan and mainly because she is not very much aware of which elements to teach. "We need someone from the older generation to teach us. I only know some customs, such as marriage, but topics such as art and music I don't know much about." Therefore, she teaches her schoolchildren art and music from the lowlands.

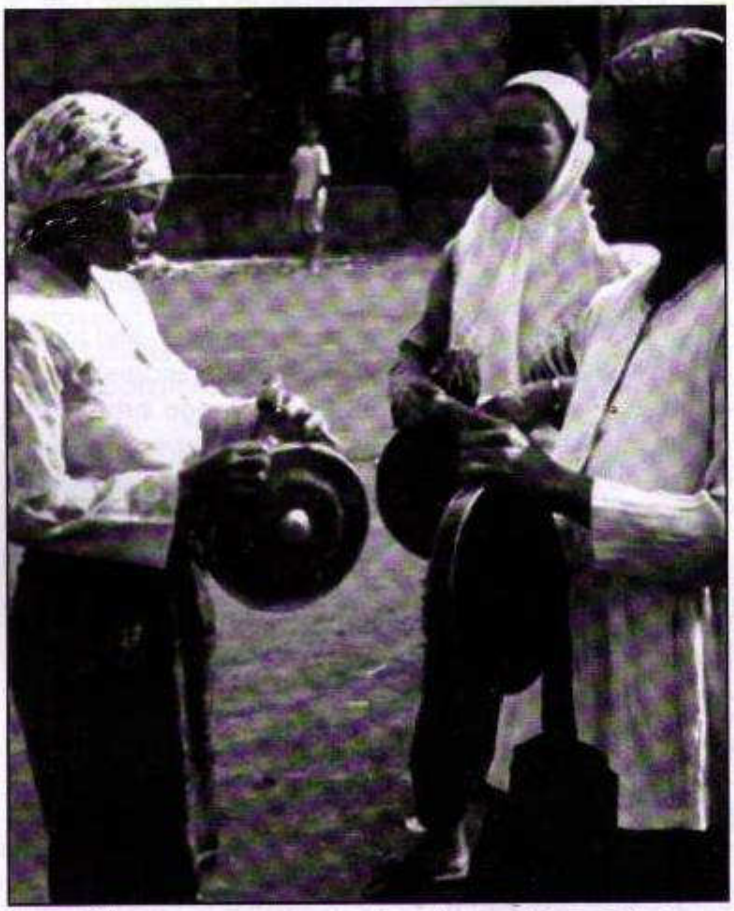
It is not as if that the Teduray culture is totally alien to the pre-schoolers. Somehow, the use of the traditional language is still intact and is widely used as a teaching medium. Some of the children could hardly understand English and Tagalog that the teachers needed to translate the content of the books into Teduray. Not everyone sees

to the Roots

this as advantageous, though. "We were once reprimanded by the former teachers on why we use our own language to teach. They said that we are making our children backward and ignorant," says Juliet Rufino, another pre-school teacher.

When the Stiftung fuer Kinder came to visit their school in October 2005, the children performed a modern dance number for their guests. It was appreciated by the board members who came along, although one of them expressed that she wished to see the children perform their traditional dance. The teachers then related the fact that the children are more aware of the dances that they see on television than those of their tradition, mainly because no one dances them anymore.

"One of the factors why traditional dance is not practiced anymore is the lack of musical instruments," says Mary Jean Quinlat, Stiftung fuer Kinder's local project manager. "These instruments, namely the *Agongs* (small brass gongs), have become rare and are nowadays expensive. There are only few people in the tribe that own them and these are not for sale because they are *pusaka*, or inherited from their ancestors," she narrates. Lack of motivation from the parents of the schoolchildren to learn the traditional arts and culture is also seen one of the factors. One of the parents pointed out, "even if I have them, I don't know how to play them."



Elder Teduray women playing the traditional Agongs.

When the Stiftung fuer Kinder – SAKAPA (Samahan ng mga Katutubo sa Pandan) Pre-School celebrated its foundation day on August 21, 2006, the pre-schoolers surprised their guests with their performance of the traditional Teduray and Muslim dances. The parents cooperated in providing traditional costumes for the children and the parents themselves dressed up for the occasion. Barangay Pandan became a colorful stage for the said event. Some old Tedurays volunteered to play the Agong and some of them also performed their traditional dance for courtship, as once practiced by their ancestors. It was a spectacular presentation pulled together by *bayanihan*.

Every now and then, the teachers would encourage their children to sing traditional songs and do not hesitate to explain concepts of science in the Teduray language. The parents are also excited that their children are learning about their own culture – something that they themselves have to learn as well.

The son of the Barangay Chairwoman, Tata, was the choreographer of the program. He is active in school activities and has learned the traditional dances around the community, which he has seen occasionally while growing up in South Upi. He has no problems in teaching the dances and passing on the beautiful arts of the Teduray culture to the pre-schoolers, except that "some of them really move a lot and do not listen." To this, pre-school teacher Ferdinand Gunsi explained, "they are really like that. They are children." Teacher Juliet Rufino just laughed at this. She shares her experience how these very active Teduray school children cannot be kept still and if one tries to make them, they go out of the classroom and jump around the swings.

Though the children rolled around the tables and run around the stage, they did deliver a very good performance, which was satisfying for the parents and the guests alike. It was a pleasure for everyone in that school building to see how their ancient culture is once again alive and the new generation of Tedurays are being reminded of how beautiful their traditions are and that it should be preserved by all means. They want their children to grow up proud of their cultural heritage, to be proud of being a Lumad, proud to be a Teduray.

TACUB ... from page 9

Politics, T. J. S. George quoted a confidential 1973 study by a Muslim activist on behalf of a government department, saying that the Ilaga was founded in Cotabato City in September 1970 by Wenceslao de la Serna of Alamada; Esteban Doruelo of Pigkawayan, who was then running for Governor in Cotabato Province; Pacifico de la Serna of Libungan; Nicholas Dequiña, a former officer of the Philippine Constabulary (PC); Bonifacio Tejada of Mlang; Conrado Lemana of Tulunan and Mayor Jose Escribano of Tacurong.

Some members of the Teduray ethnic group also joined the ILAGA terror gang. Their leader was Feliciano Luces (a. k. a. Kumander Toothpick), an Ilongo protégé of Philippine Constabulary (PC) Captain Tronco who was then a mayoralty candidate in Upi running against Michael "Datu Puti" Sinsuat.

Both in Cotabato and Lanao Provinces, the terror sowed by the ILAGA was at its peak in 1971. In June 19 that year, in what came to have been known later as the Manili Massacre, some seventy Moro – men, women and children – were mercilessly killed by the notorious gangsters, with the backing of the PC, inside a mosque in Manili village in Carmen, Cotabato.

Aboard five trucks, a group of Maranaos went to Magsaysay town in Lanao del Norte to cast their votes.

When they reached Tacub village in Kauswagan town on their way back to the evacuation centers where they were staying, they came upon a checkpoint of the Philippine Army.

On the pretext of searching concealed weapons, the military men manning the checkpoint ordered those aboard the trucks to alight and lie flat on the road, face down. As soon as they were able to comply with the military men's order, the deadly command, "Fire!" was heard. When the gun smoke cleared, at least 60 bodies, bathed in their own blood, lay sprawled on the ground. While some sources placed the number of those killed as thirty-nine or forty, most Muslim sources claim sixty persons were killed.

After an hour, a group of reporters, who covered the special election, arrived at the site of the tragic incident.

The reporters found a small group of soldiers in the checkpoint. Aside from the soldiers, they saw some civilians, apparently members of the much dreaded ILAGA gang, with white headbands checking the trucks.

T. J. S. George described what the reporters found, thus: "They saw the small bands of soldiers lounging lazily about their checkpost. But a number of civilians with white headbands were rummaging about, inspecting the trucks – and markedly uninterested in the victims of the shooting who were lying in their own blood, a few of them still alive. An elderly man, badly wounded, prayed as his body twitched in spasms. One of the 'inspectors' asked him to shut up. As the old man went on praying, the man with the headband kicked him — and there was silence. A bleeding man tried to stand up, uttered an unusual scream, then slumped, head first to the road."

The next morning, the story about the carnage spread throughout the country.

"It became painfully clear that there had been some collusion between the soldiers and the gangsters," as George would put it.

George further explained that "officials searched in vain for a convincing explanation. They faced the unsettling fact that, unlike the Magsaysay tragedy a month earlier, the troops in Tacub had neither the excuse of a siege emergency nor an arguable motive of vengeance. One explanation subsequently offered was that the ambush-killing of troops in Magsaysay in October had generally made soldiers so tense that at the merest suggestion of an attack they pulled the trigger in a reflexive act of self-preservation. But panic hardly justified the lack of attention shown the victims and the accommodation apparently extended to the mysterious civilians in white headbands."

Much as they wanted to, the government officials did not find any excuse for the barbarous act. No amount of explanations could exonerate them from culpability for that heinous crime.

"The fact that a local patrol could make common cause with underworld and mow down a group of unarmed people confirmed the feeling among Muslims that their persecutors enjoyed the support of the establishment," George claimed.

Till this day, the hapless victims of the massacre are still crying for justice.

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Freedom of Choice for the Lumads

The MILF assures the indigenous peoples that they are free to decide whether they are in or out of the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity.

By Taher G. Solaiman

"When we entered into peace negotiations with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)," said Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, chair of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), "we asserted that part of the solution to our problem in Mindanao is restitution of our *kawarisan* (ancestral domain) to the Bangsamoro people." The MILF Chairperson made this clear as he met with leaders of the indigenous peoples in the Office of the Bangsamoro Development Agency in Sultan Kudrat last September 13, 2006.

The meeting was part of the consultation process of the MILF with the various peace stakeholders in Mindanao. It was attended by many indigenous peoples (IP) leaders, such as Datu Caid Lansawan of Kisupaan, President Roxas, North Cotabato; Daniel Pontongan, Victor Pabro, John Esta, Balagtas Ekamat and Charlie Saliling of Carmen, also of North Cotabato and Pedro Anggaan of Damulog Bukidnon.

In his opening statement, Murad recalled the hardships and sufferings they experienced during their 30-year struggle and what is left of it. "As regards to our homeland, only the mountains (for the non-Islamized natives) and the marshes (for the Islamized ones) are left to us," Murad pointed out. The ancestral domain claim is one of the hardlines in the Bangsamoro struggle.

The MILF defines Bangsamoro ancestral domain as "all lands and areas, including the environment and natural resources therein of the Bangsamoro people, established through occupation, possession and dominion since time immemorial, by cultural bond, customary law, historic rights and legal titles.

Murad, however, expressed optimism that "with our considerable gains in our peace negotiations with the government, we may soon reap the fruits of our sacrifices." The GRP has already recognized the Bangsamoro as a distinct people and nation. According to Murad, the territory of the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity may automatically include all areas in Mindanao that are predominantly populated by the Bangsamoro Muslims.

However, the population of Mindanao has considerably changed over time. "We have to consider the present reality in Mindanao. We just cannot drive away the Settlers here," Murad stressed. As for the Lumads, the non-Islamized natives of Mindanao, "will be entitled to a freedom of choice whether or not they would opt to join the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity."

In the matter of the Shari-ah (Islamic Law), Murad assured the IP leaders that it will be applied on the Islamized Bangsamoro and not on the non-Muslims. Neither will the non-Muslims be forced to convert into Islam. "There is no compulsion in religion," he quotes from the Holy Qu'ran.

On the issue of governance, Murad said that all the natives of Mindanao will be duly represented.

Pontongan, one of the IP leaders, asked what would happen to their claims on their ancestral domain under the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) should there be signed a peace pact between the MILF and the GRP. Murad told the group that such claims will be duly recognized by the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity.

On the contrary, Datu Caid Lansawan of Kisupaan, does not see the necessity of separating from the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity. He clarified the fact that he and his people were not consulted by the IP leaders who signed

a manifesto last July 24, 2006 in Lantapan, Bukidnon, opposing the inclusion of the IP ancestral domain into the Bangsamoro Homeland.

"I think no one could question my leaning. I am for Mindanao. I am one with the Bangsamoro who struggle for the Homeland," Lansawan said.

The Moro Struggle for the Right to Self-Determination

By TAHER G. SOLAIMAN

As early as 1450, Sultan Shariff ul-Hashim was able to establish the Sulu Sultanate. The establishment of the Sultanate of Maguindanao by Shariff Kabungsuwan followed in the early 16th century. The formation of the Sultanate of Buayan came in mid-16th century. The *Pat a Pangampong ko Ranao* (Confederation of the Four Lake-based Emirates) and other political subdivisions followed suit. Even Manila at that time was a Muslim stronghold and was ruled by Rajah Sulaiman Mahmud.

Every sultanate consisted of groups of villages that were under the dominion of the sultan. The sultan had his own court and ministers.

These sultanates, which principally held sway in Mindanao and Sulu, engaged in trade and diplomatic relations with other countries such as China, among others.

For hundred of years, the Bangsamoro people survived various military campaigns launched against them by Western imperialists and colonizers. They were able to preserve their identity as a political and social entity. This could not have been done had it not been for their well-organized administrative, political and military systems that time.

The sultanate had a centralized government structure. In fact, it is a popular belief that if the Spaniards did not colonize the Philippines, the sultanates would evolve into a unified nation-state structure just like the neighboring countries.

When the Spaniard colonizers came, later on, they attempted to conquer the Muslim states. They wanted to subdue the political existence of the sultanates and add the territory to the Spanish colonies in the Philippine Islands.

The inferiority of the war materiel of the Moros, notwithstanding, they succeeded in defending their territories and, thus, preserved their independence.

Yes, the Moro people were defeated sometimes in their fight against the colonizers. Nonetheless, they were *never* conquered. History attests to this fact.

As the Spaniards never had real sovereignty over the Moro territories, they had neither a moral nor a legal basis to include said areas in what they ceded to the United States in the 1898 Treaty of Paris.

When the US came, the resistance of the Bangsamoro was not as fierce as it used to be in the time of Spaniards.

However, the .45 caliber pistol could not have been invented by the Americans had it not been for the Moro resistance. The .38 caliber pistol the Americans used earlier just could not stop a *kris*-wielding Moro running after an enemy armed with sophisticated firearms. It could have been why the US governed the Moro territories separate from other area in the Philippine Islands.

The Bangsamoro, up to present, are still fighting for their right to self-determination. They are still fighting for the restoration of their independence.

The Bangsamoro people are not asking for the whole moon, anyway. What they are demanding is for them to be given the chance to exercise their right to self-determination in the areas in Mindanao where they are still the majority.

In the course of the present peace negotiations peace between the Government of the Republic of Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF), the strand on territory seems to be the most controversial.

The failure of the GRP to submit its proposal on the territory of the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) in the 13th Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia last September 6-7, 2006 was the reason for the current impasse.

But, at last, the GRP peace panel submitted its two-page letter-proposal last November 9. The MILF leadership received it a day after.

Mohagher Iqbal, chair of the MILF peace panel, commenting on the GRP proposal, said that "they (GRP panel) just enlarged the ring." He also described it as "good for the eyes to see."

While Secretary Jesus Dureza has been quoted in the newspapers as saying that the new GRP proposal on territory is anchored on the right of the Bangsamoro to self-determination.

The right to self-determination has been guaranteed by numerous international documents on human rights.

The principle of self-determination is enshrined in Article I of the Charter of the United Nations. It is recognized as a right of all peoples in the first article common to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which both entered into force in 1961. The Paragraph 1 of this Article provides:

"All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

The right to self-determination of peoples is recognized in many other international and regional instruments, among them, the Declaration of Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1970.

Rudolph C. **Rÿser once put it in his** *Killing for Self-Determination,* "Self-determination is a right guaranteed under international law to all peoples seeking to freely choose their social, economic, political and cultural future without external interference."

GRP Should Drop Criminal Charges against MILF Chair Now

(After the bombing incidents in Tacurong City and Makilala town in North Cotabato that killed six persons and injured thirty-five others on October 11, 2006, police authorities in North Cotabato filed charges of multiple murder and multiple frustrated murder against MILF Chair Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, eight MILF local commanders and a dozen other individuals.

For lack of evidence, however, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzales announced the dropping of the criminal charges against Al Haj Murad on November 8, 2006. The following commentary was published by the MindaNews on October 31, 2006. —TGS)

"Even if the government can beat the deadline (31 October 2006) and bring up an acceptable proposition on territory, the talks cannot resume unless the names of Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and other MILF members included in the criminal complaint in connection with the bombings in Makilala, North Cotabato and Tacurong City will be deleted."

Thus, Mohagher Iqbal, chief of the peace negotiating panel of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), was quoted by the www.luwaran.com last 28 October.

During the13th Exploratory Talks between the GRP [Government of the Republic of the Philippines] and the MILF peace negotiating panels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia last 6-7 September, the GRP panel asked the Malaysian facilitator that it be given till 30 September to submit its proposal on the strand on territory of the contentious ancestral domain issue.

Realizing the fact that it could not make it to its self-imposed deadline, the GRP panel, later, asked for an extension of the deadline until 31 October 2006.

Whether or not the GRP panel can make it to the deadline this time, no one knows yet. One thing, however, is certain. The Philippine government should delete the name of Al Haj Murad and that of the other MILF members from the criminal charges filed against them in connection to the bombings in Tacurong City and Makilala, North Cotabato, if the peace talks must resume.

At least, this is what the MILF says. And rightly so.

Meanwhile, in a press communiqué dated 25 October 2006, Aleem Abdul Aziz Mimbantas, vice chair on military affairs of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) condemned "in the strongest words possible the maliciously false and blatantly fabricated charges of multiple murder and multiple frustrated murder" against MILF chair Al Haj Murad.

Mimbantas described the filing of such charges against Al Haj Murad as "a ploy to pressure the MILF to return to the negotiating table and use these trumped-up charges as leverage and as a bargaining tool to impose its unacceptable conditions in the negotiations on the Front."

No less than Philippine National Police (PNP) Director-General Oscar Calderon admitted on 12 October 2006, when he visited Central Mindanao, that the PNP did not have evidence that would link the MILF to the three bombing incidents in Tacurong City and Makilala, North Cotabato last 10 October and in Cotabato City the next day.

At least four persons were injured in the Tacurong City bombing while six persons were killed and 29 others were injured in Makilala some eight hours later. No one was hurt in the bomb explosion in Cotabato City

Despite the absence of sufficient evidence, Supt. Marcelo Pintac, chief of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) in North Cotabato, facilitated the filing of multiple murder and multiple frustrated murder cases, last 17 October against Al Haj Murad and eight alleged MILF commanders in connection with the bombings in Makilala and Tacurong City.

Besides, twelve other persons were also charged with the same complaints, among them, Kagui Akmad Bayam, former spokesperson of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Presently, Bayam is the assistant secretary for external affairs in the office of Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

The inclusion of the name of Kagui Akmad Bayam is something preposterous, to say the least. What baffles our mind even more is the claim by a "witness" that Al Haj Murad "personally supervised the planning and assembling of the bombs in Camp Usman Ibni Khattab in Magpet, North Cotabato".

That Al Haj Murad, a renowned leader of an organization as big as the MILF, went to the area for the reason stated by the "witness", indeed, defies reason.

Besides, we firmly believe that the MILF does not employ terrorism as a means to achieve its objectives, among them, to regain the illegally and immorally usurped legitimate and inalienable rights of the Bangsamoro people to freedom and self-determination.

Mimbantas, in the said press communiqué, said:

"This filing of ridiculous charges against the MILF Chairman is also a sinister scheme calculated to divert public attention from the breakdown of negotiations and the issues that caused the breakdown.

"By the same token, these baseless charges are intended to single out the MILF Chairman for character assassination in order to create disunity and demoralization within the Front, and to neutralize the surging spirit, morale and unity of the various sectors of the Bangsamoro people in the context of our struggle for justice and freedom.

"In the face of this new vicious plot targeting the leadership of the MILF, we declare that the Front, side by side with our people, stands firmly and solidly behind the MILF Chairman.

"As Vice Chairman for Military Affairs of the Front, therefore, I am serving notice to the Philippine government that we consider this latest affront against our most respected and beloved MILF Chairman AL Haj Murad as no less than an act of hostile provocation whose dire consequences will widen the existing cleavage between the MILF and the Philippine Government.

"The Philippine Government, thus, should ponder over the serious implications of this provocative act. For this will definitely and detrimentally affect the Peace Process and hinder its movement forward as no legitimate revolutionary organization will ever agree into continuing the negotiations while its leaders are treated as criminals by the other party."

The Philippine government should pay serious attention and take into account what the MILF says this time if it is serious enough in the peace negotiations.

...we firmly believe that the MILF does not employ terrorism as a means to achieve its objectives, among them, to regain the illegally and immorally usurped legitimate and inalienable rights of the Bangsamoro people to freedom and self-determination.

"The wish to pray is prayer itself."

-- GEORGE BERNANOS
The Diary of a Country Priest

Mediation Skill as a God-given Gift

An Interview with Haja Saada Manondog Singgon

By Daniel Ong

Haja Saada Manandog Singgon is around 60 years old — a dark, burly but gentle Maguindanao woman — and almost all parties stuck in seemingly irreconcilable conflict come to her for help. She was in the same car which this writer took in going to Palembang, Sultan Kudarat three days ago; talking with the driver about a case she was just able to settle out of court.

*She was sewing something at the porch of her house when this writer, accompanied by one PASALI*staff, arrived. Her husband, Haji Mustapha Singgon, was beside her, silently smoking a cigarette. From the kitchen, one could smell the sweet smell of rice cake cooked in sugar and coconut milk.*

Haja Saada set aside her sewing and offered us a plate of newly cooked rice cake and a 1-liter bottle of coke. In between bites of steaming rice cake and sips of lukewarm cola, we started talking about her role as a conflict mediator and her wish for her community and Palembang as a whole.

Do you originally come from this place?

No. I was raised in Datu Piang, Maguindanao. My husband is from Cotabato; his parents come from Kabuntalan and Dinaig. He moved to Datu Piang in 1948 in search of land. We met each other there. Majority of the inhabitants there then were Moros.

When did you start mediating conflicts?

I can't exactly remember. But I think I have been doing it for more than 20 years already. I feel as if it's a gift given to me by God.

What makes people seek your help in settling their problems?

Maybe they just feel comfortable to approach me and they trust me for being fair. Both the Muslims and the Christians come to me when they have grave problems, not only from Palembang but also from places as far as General Santos and Cotabato City.

What kinds of conflicts or problems do you usually handle?

Almost of all sorts – family problems, relations between husband and wife, land dispute, conflict between neighbours, etc.

Of the problems you handled, which do you think was or were the most difficult?

Those are problems involving family relations, especially between husband and wife; and those cases involving land. The one I just mediated in General Santos is a good example. A married Muslim guy made another lady pregnant. The aggrieved party rejected *duaya* (for the lady to be a second, third or fourth wife) as a solution; thus a settlement had to be found.

And what was the settlement?

The aggrieved party agreed for a monetary settlement of PhP 70,000. PhP 30,000 has already been paid and the remaining balance has to be paid within 2 months.

What do you normally use as basis in making decisions?

In cases involving Muslims, I generally base it on the teachings of the Holy Koran, but I do not use or refer to the Koran in a very strict way. What is more important is to be perceived by contending parties as being neutral or objective. I always ask both parties about their side of the story and base my decisions on the facts available. I weigh the facts and then ask who I think the guilty party

is, to makehim/her admit who is at fault. If he/she does admit, I then ask him/her to ask forgiveness from the offended party. Depending on the gravity of the offence done, a corresponding penalty or settlement has to be arrived at.

What kind of penalty or settlement, for example?

It could be monetary, like what I cited before, or it could be in kind. A forgiveness granted by the offended party would also suffice.

In monetary settlements, how high could a settlement go?

It could go as high as PhP 500,000, or even higher. Let me cite you another case, one of the most difficult I ever handled:

There was this businessman involved in buying scrap iron. One day, two men of a Mayor informed him that they have an old, worn-out pay-loader for sale. After having a look at the pay-loader, this businessman paid the two an amount for it. He already had the pay-loader chopped into pieces and started transporting them when the mayor summoned him to his office.

At his office, the Mayor castigated the businessman for not having verified from him if the pay loader was really for sale and if the two guys were authorized to sell them. He even threatened the businessman that he could end up in jail for what he had done.

So, one day the poor guy came to my place crying and begging me for help. He was in deep trouble, on the verge of breaking down. I pitied him and promised to do my best to mediate in the problem.

And what did you do?

I talked with the Mayor. I told him: "Look, this poor guy would not have bought that Caterpillar without the offer or participation of your two men. I think it is thus unfair for him to solely shoulder the damages you have been asking him for."

And what did the Mayor say?

I knew that he already had been speculating on possible or alternative payment the businessman would be able to offer. But at same time, he also was not able to ignore my argument about the complicity of his two men. Anyway, we settled for an amount of Php 75,000 as damages.

So the businessman did pay Php 75,000?

No. Php 20.000 of it had to be paid by the Mayor's men. But since the two could not pay the said amount, they had to work at the Mayor's office without pay.

Wide Coastline. Once a major MNLF disembarkation point for smuggled firearms, Palembang's wide and deep coastline now offers sustainable livelihood opportunities for its inhabitants.

Fields of green. Annabel Rotalla, a PASALI community organizer beams with pride over the green fields of rice planted by beneficiaries.

And what did you do?

After a meeting with the concerned residents here, we have agreed to do something to prevent the impending military assault and possible lost of innocent lives. We loaded ourselves in one truck – adults, elderly and children – and headed to the disputed village and positioned the truck, with us civilians on it, at the entrance road before the occupied barangay. Then, I asked for Commander Diok and told him that this truckload of civilians will be the first one who will be sacrificed in the military attack if his forces will not withdraw immediately from the area. Within 2 hours, his forces moved out.

But was your intervention not perceived as taking the side of the military?

I did not care. My primary concern then was to spare the lives of the innocent civilians in the conflict. And many people, especially the civilians, were thankful for what I did.

And the businessman only had to pay the remaining Php 55,000?

He also did not. I talked with some municipal *Kagawads (council members)*, explained to them the businessman's precarious situation, and appealed to them for help. They shelled out Php 40,000. So in the end, the businessman only had to pay Php 15,000. out of his own pocket.

Had there been also cases where one party to the conflict came back to you because of unfulfilled obligations on the part of the guilty party?

So far, there had been none.

How about cases involving armed groups such the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) or Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)? Did any of these armed groups ever approach you?

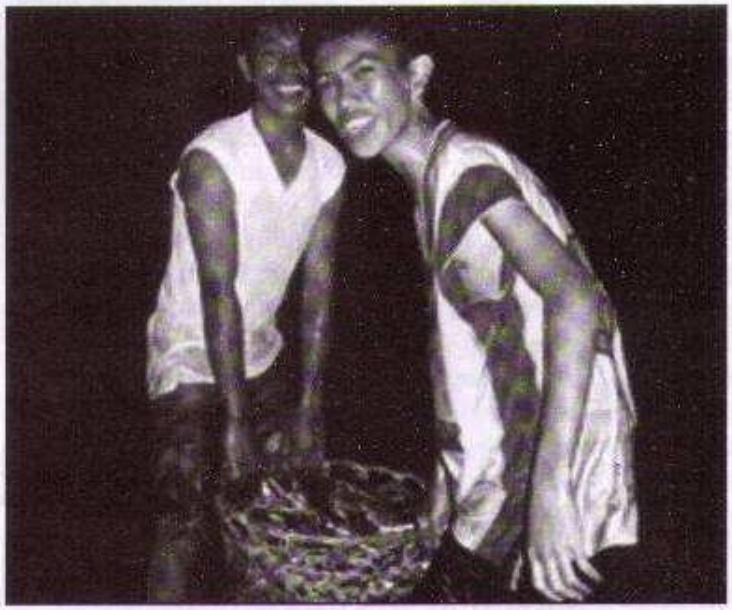
Not directly. But during the war here in early 2000, I mediated a conflict involving the MNLF and the military.

Can you explain in what way?

At that time, members of the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) were hunting for 'terrorists', which they believed, were operating in the area here. People in a number of barrios already started evacuating. The MNLF, then under the command of Commander Diok, held one area (1-2 barrios) hostage. The head of the military informed me that they are going to attack the MNLF-held area within 5 hours unless the MNLF withdraws. Most of the residents here have relatives in that place and thus asked me to intervene.

Do you receive any form of compensation for your work?

No. And I never did ask. I believe in the saying that once you have done something good to your neighbour, you will also receive something good in return. When one of my sons, for example, hit someone in a car accident, many of those people I helped in the past came in and donated some amount for my family to be able to pay for the damages. Without their help, my son could have ended up in jail.



Bounty from the sea. Young fisherman carry a basket of their catch from a fishing expedition.

Are you happy with the role you have been playing as a mediator in conflicts?

Of course! It's a wonderful feeling to be of help to the community. But my husband has already been complaining about my frequent and often spontaneous travels. And this is especially if I am the one spending for a *kanduli* (a thanksgiving feast) to celebrate the settlement of a problem or feud.

Last question: What is your special wish or hope for Palembang and its people?

Peace. I also wish for mutual understanding between and among the Muslims, Christians and the Manobos; and economic opportunities for our people here. I am glad that PASALI has initiated these livelihood projects in our town. Our place has been devastated by war and neglected by the government for so long. PASALI has given a new hope to our people.

About the Author: *Daniel Ong works with the Peacebuilding Program of Kadtuntaya Foundation, Inc.(KFI) as a seconded personnel of the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED). He did this interview during a project visit to Palembang on July 20, 2005. Haja Saada's story will be included in a book which will be published by CIDSE (a network of European-based Catholic development organizations) by the end of 2006.*

* PASALI refers to the Philippine Association of Sea-based Workers for Savings, Loans and Initiatives based in the Netherlands which, through savings mobilisation, initiated an innovative livelihood project in Palembang, Sultan Kudarat (pop.: 45,000) on March 2004. The project involves community organising, micro-credit program for small farmers and fisherfolks, skills-transfer, and rehabilitation of damaged ecosystems though a gradual shift to ecological fishing and farming practices. Aside from alleviating poverty, the project also aims to be a medium for dialogue and co-operation between and among the Christian, Muslim and Manobo (an indigenous or *Lumad* tribe) residents in the project area.

Peacebuilding through Humanitarian Relief

In the peak of civil strife, relief operations open the road to peace

By Pressia Arifin

At the height of displacement due to the conflict in Datu Piang/Shariff Aguak last June 2006, around 10 or more CSO-owned vehicles and a number of large trucks filled with rice, mongo beans, sardines, soap and other commodities could be seen passing through the roads from Cotabato City to these areas, at least once a week. Local NGO workers and staff of international organizations, together with the International Monitoring Team (IMT), worked hand in hand, rain or shine, to bring relief to the displaced population.

Most of these organizations have different mandates, stemming from community development to peace building. Despite of this, they have managed to spare time and pool resources to respond to the pressing need of a high number of internally displaced persons that were victims of the conflict. On the eve of the relief operations, workers and volunteers of local NGO in the area would be seen gathering in an office, spread out on the floor, repacking sacks of rice, sugar and other items, dividing cans of sardines per family. Sometimes, repacking can take a whole day or could even extend overnight. Relief goods are made to correspond to the number of displaced families to ensure fair distribution.

> Humanitarian relief is designed to provide the immediate means of survival for victims of conflict continually at risk.

According to the DSWD survey of July 15, 2006, there were about 13 barangays affected by the conflict, mounting to about 5,965 families and a total of 29, 653 affected persons. The Mindanao Emergency Response Network (MERN) immediately convened its network members to possibly solicit donations for its relief operations. International organizations and NGOs, such as the World Food Programme, UNICEF, International Red Cross have also pledged donations in kind, while the International Monitoring Team (IMT) has provided assistance in securing the area while relief operations are taking place.

Some NGOs, such as the United Youth of the Philippines (UNYPHIL), while unable to contribute relief goods, have

provided volunteers to help in the repacking of goods and their distribution. Other NGOs, such as the Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc. (KFI) and the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), helped not only through the provision of goods but also vehicles needed for the operations. Handicap International, on the other hand, managed to conduct a medical mission in the area to help those who acquired diseases through lack of sanitation and nutrition.

These kinds of events, while lacking national coverage although already affecting a massive number of casualties and damages, is something that the civil society of Maguindanao has immediately focused on. The conflict is still ongoing and direct intervention is impossible, hence it is not within the capacities of these organizations to get in the line of fire. The CSOs in Maguindanao reacted to issues they could respond to, such as human suffering. It can be seen as their way of dealing with the conflict, even with limited means. While relief operations are a temporary

Relief operations in Mamasapano last July 2006.

solution, it has managed to pacify the stakeholders to the conflict and a way to send ordinary people ravaged by the war a message that they are not left behind and that conflicts such as these is a concern for everyone, not just the victims themselves.

Humanitarian relief is designed to provide the immediate means of survival for victims of conflict continually at risk. Theoretically, it is not included in the concept of peace building but as Maguindanao has been the stage for various conflicts since the early 70s, it is a way of building peace in communities continually victimized by the atrocities of conflict. When humanitarian relief takes place, it gives the people a primary base for continuing to live after the war; it gives hope to the people that they could survive the war. After the hostilities, these victims of conflict return to their

In this kind of conflict that seems to be never-ending, peace building could not afford to wait until hostilities have ceased; it should begin now and it begins through humanitarian relief.

humble beginnings but are aware that they might have again to flee; their only aspiration is that during those crucial hours of evacuating their homes, that humanitarian relief may come once again.

Peace building is usually initiated in post-conflict situations but the current state of affairs in Mindanao, it could hardly be called post-conflict. Therefore, building peace among the peoples and the communities could only be approximated by the intervention of civil society through humanitarian relief. Without humanitarian relief, people tend to be more aggressive due to lack of food, sanitation, clothing and housing, inspiring agitation and competition in their small communities; with humanitarian relief, people could at least be given their basic needs, draw away from hostilities with each other in the midst of the hostilities outside the evacuation centers. It is also widely observed that areas receiving humanitarian relief tend to draw from hostilities, even for a while, as civil society organizations are not willing to distribute goods in the event of a crossfire.

On one relief operation in an MILF-protected area, MILF leaders have laid down their arms and helped organized the communities, coordinating the various IDPs and filing the people in lines accordingly. They have also coordinated with the CSOs during their ground assessment, placed requests on the goods needed by their people and helped the CSOs distribute relief cards. The leaders have also organized the families so that relief distribution could be orderly. This has helped the CSOs in their operations, especially in distributing the relief goods efficiently and in equality to all.

Although humanitarian relief is popularly seen as a temporary solution, it is the breaking ground towards peace building activities in the area. After the distribution of relief goods and once people start to feel safe to return to their homes, CSOs start to intervene in rehabilitation and reconstruction, which are very important elements in the general notion of peace building. In this kind of conflict that seems to be never-ending, peace building could not afford to wait until hostilities have ceased; it should begin now and it begins through humanitarian relief.

CBCS REGIONAL UPDATES

The First CBCS Council Meeting was held at MSU, Marawi City on April 10, 2006 to act on the recommendations adopted during the 3-day First CBCS Leaders General Summing-Up held at MSU, Marawi City on January 17 to 19, 2006.

The first among the major action points resolved during this meeting is the conduction of series of meetings with the seven CBCS Regional Management Committees to provide inputs on report making, proper accounting and liquidation of financial expenses.

Resolved also during this meeting is the holding of CBCS regional assemblies for deepening orientation of network members about the CBCS. This had resulted the scheduling of RMCs meeting from March to May 2006.

In implementing these action points, the Executive Committee also held its 1st meeting at the MSU, Marawi City in the afternoon of the same day to schedule the regional meetings. After which, the Secretariat held series of meetings among the 7 CBCS Regional Management Committees (RMCs) from June to August 2006 which resulted the scheduling of series of network assemblies with the 7 CBCS regional formations from September to October 2006.

Among the key participants in these meetings were the officers and members of the RMCs led by their respective chairpersons.

While in the middle of implementation of these series of regional network assemblies, the setting of regional consultations and planning of strategic directions were scheduled with the same CBCS regional network formations and it was decided to merge the two activities slated from September to October 2006.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

1. Setting of a Regional Consultations and Strategic Direction Planning
   September to October 2006

   A series of regional consultations were held with the 7 CBCS regional management committees purposely to conduct a general assessment and set astrategic direction.

   These regional consultations were held respectively in Pagadian City for the Sibugay Region, Zamboanga City for the ZamBas and Lupah Sug Region, Davao City for the Kaagan Region, General Santos City for the Rajah Buayan Region, Marawi City for the Pat a Pangampong a Ranaw and Cotabato City for the Kutawato Empire Region.

   These regional consultations were held during the month of September to October 2006 and were attended by each regional management committee officers and members.

   The regional consultations resulted to the development of the socio-economic and political profile of each region and the planning of set its own strategic direction for the next 3 years.

   The conduction of these regional consultations started from September 4, 2006 and ended on October 7, 2006 with Ferdinand Derequito as the main facilitator.

   These series of regional consultations were attended also by the officers and members of the seven CBCS RMCs including some of their identified key leaders.

Consultation meeting with the CBCS Rajah Buayan Region.

CBCS Kutawato Region attends a consultation meeting with the CBCS Secretariat.

The discussions on regional situations were led by the RMC Chairpersons namely, Dr. Pendatun Pangadil of Kutawato Empire Region, Oscar Solaiman of Rajah Buayan Region, Sammy Buat of Dabaw Region, Mokong Sanguila of Ranaw Region, Sultan Maguid Maruhom of Sibugay Region, Nathan Insung of ZamBas Region and Cocoy Tulawie of Lupah Sug Region.

The Regional Consultation and Strategic Direction Setting was facilitated by Ferdinand Derequito, CORDAID Program Evaluator with Sammy Maulana, CBCS Acting Secretary-General as Co-Facilitator.

2. 2nd CBCS Expanded Council Meeting
KFI Training Center, KFI Building, Doña Pilar St.
Cotabato City, October 8 to 9, 2006

A 2-day Expanded Council Meeting held at the KFI Training Center, KFI Bldg., Doña Pilar St., Cotabato City on October 8 to 9, 2006.

The objective of the 2-Day Expanded Council Meeting was to validate and to conduct an in-depth study and analysis of the general outputs of the regional consultations for confirmation by the Council members.

Upon confirmation of the outputs, this will serve as a basis to develop the 3-year continuity proposal for CORDAID.

The Expanded Council Meeting was attended by 10 Council members, 7 RMC representatives and the CBCS Head Secretariat. It was presided over by CBCS Chairperson Guiamel Alim.

3. Three-Day Write-shop for CBCS Secretariat
MTRC, Bajada, Davao City
October 13 to 15, 2006

A 3-day Write-shop was held in MTRC, Davao City on October 13 to 15, 2006. This was attended by the core of CBCS Secretariat, which was facilitated by Ferdinand Derequito, CORDAID Project Evaluator.

The primary purpose of the 3-day write-shop is to consolidate and synthesize the outputs of the Expanded Council Meeting to develop the 3-year continuity proposal for CORDAID.

This has resulted to the finalization of the CBCS 3-Year Continuity Proposal which was already submitted to CORDAID on October 16, 2006 for perusal and possible consideration. This was attended by the core members of the CBCS Head Secretariat.

The 3-day Writeshop was facilitated by Ferdinand Derequito, CORDAID Program Evaluator.

4. RMC Re-planning and Implementation

With the call made by the CBCS Head Secretariat to intensify mass awareness on human rights and comprehensive peace building, each CBCS RMC instituted some revision in their plan to concretize the expression of the call in their respective regions.

To date, the seven CBCS RMCs have now launched the implementation of their revised plans within their own regional coverage, which should be completed by the end of December 2006.

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OIC Session on Harmony of Rights, Freedom & Justice

Azerbaijan, 19-21 June 2006

RESOLUTION No. 2/33-MM

The Thirty-third Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, (Session on Harmony of Rights, Freedoms and Justice), held in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan from 23 to 25 Jumada Awal, 1427H (19-21 June 2006),

Bearing in mind the resolutions of the OIC and the recommendations of the Ministerial Committee of Eight on the question of Muslims in Southern Philippines;

Recalling the Tripoli Agreement signed on 23 December 1976, under the auspices of the OIC, between the Government of the Republic of Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which the signatory parties agreed to consider as the basis for a permanent, just and comprehensive political solution to the question of Muslims in Southern Philippines within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines;

Paying tribute to the role of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, under the wise leadership of H.E. Colonel Moamar Gaddafi, in achieving the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 and in hosting the first preliminary talks in Tripoli from 3 to 4 October 1992 and the Unity and Solidarity Meeting of the MNLF leaders on 6 April 2003;

Also paying tribute to the role of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in facilitating the peace process culminating in the signing of the Final Peace Agreement on 2 September 1996, and **expressing satisfaction** for the efforts of the Ministerial Committee of Eight in this regard;

Recalling that in accordance with the two Memoranda of Understanding by which the GRP and the MNLF concluded two rounds of preliminary talks, held successively in Tripoli, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on 3-4 October 1992 and in Cipanas, Western Java, Republic of Indonesia on 14-16 April, 1993, the two parties agreed to conduct official peace negotiations for the full implementation of the letter and spirit of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement;

Recalling also the results of the four rounds of formal peace talks held in Jakarta, Indonesia, including the subsidiary mechanisms, between the GRP and the MNLF, through facilities made available by the OIC Committee of Eight;

Noting that the gains achieved through the Peace Agreement concluded between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the MNLF and the cooperation obtaining between them need to be generalized and maximized to achieve comprehensive peace and development for the benefit of the people of Bangsamoro.

Taking note also of the report of the Committee of Eight which had convened a meeting on the periphery of the 32nd Session of the ICFM in Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, on 29th June 2005 and announced on the occasion the intention of the Government of the Republic of Philippines to complete the implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement before the advent of the Tenth anniversary of its signing on 2nd September 2006.

Reaffirming resolution No.2/32-MM on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines adopted by the 32nd Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, in Sana'a, Republic of Yemen on 28-30 June 2005;

Having considered the report of the Secretary General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines along with its annexed report of the Fact-Finding Mission which visited the Philippines from 17 to 24 May 2006 (Document No. ICFM/33-2006/MM/SG.REP.2) ;

Having considered the report of the Fact-Finding Mission of the Representatives of the Ministerial Committee of the Eight of the Organization of Islamic Conference dated 2nd June 2006.

1. **Renews** its support for the Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front initialled on 30 August 1996 in Jakarta and officially signed on 2 September 1996 in Manila.

2. **Calls on** both the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front to preserve the gains achieved since the signing of the Peace Agreement and **expresses** its concern over the stalled implementation of the commitments enshrined in the 1996 Agreement and the gap between the stands of the two concerned parties, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front, on the results achieved as to the Agreement's implementation.

3. **Pays tribute** to the Secretary General for the action he has taken in sending a Fact-Finding Mission to Southern Philippines led by Mr. Sayed Kassem El-Masry, Advisor to the Secretary General, which undertook together with the Ambassadors of the Member Countries of the Committee of 8 stationed in Manila, a successful visit to the Republic of the Philippines **appreciates** the efforts for the said expanded mission in discharging its assignment, **commends** the report it prepared which is attached to the Secretary General's report to this Conference, and **endorses** the observations and recommendations included in the report.

4. **Welcomes** the substance of the joint communiqué issued in Manila by the Philippine Government and the OIC delegation on 22nd May 2006, and **appreciates** H.E. President Gloriaf Macapagal Arroyo for receiving the Head of the OIC Mission and his accompanying delegation and for the exchange of views undertaken on the conclusions reached by the Mission, particularly the suspension of military operations in the island of Sulu, achieved during the mission's visit to the island. Appreciates further the positive response of Her Excellency to the said appeal of the Secretary General to grant a humanitarian and dignified treatment to Mr. Missuari.

5. **Calls** for an urgent high level tripartite meeting between the O.I.C., the Government of the Republic of Philippine (GRP) and the MNLF to be held in Jeddah as soon as practicable during 2006 to review the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement and make its assessment of the progress made and the obstacles facing its full implementation. The tripartite meeting is also mandated to draw up modalities for a new Joint Monitoring Committee to observe the implementation of the peace treaty and verify complaints in this regard and facilitate agreed solutions to such complaints.

6. **Appeals** to the Government of Philippines to expedite the legal process regarding Prof. Nur Missuari's case and express the hope that this process will lead to his early release to enable him to participate in the fourth coming tripartite meeting, continue his constructive role in leading the Bangsamoro people and achieve its aspiration for security, stability and development.

7. **Calls upon** the Government of the Philippines to consider the recommendations contained in the two reports of the Parliament's Commission for Peace and Reconciliation, issued on 18 May and 19 September 2005, regarding the charges of human rights violations in Sulu against the Armed Forces officers, including what was known as the massacre of 1 February 2005 (the murder of Imam Badiwan and his family) and that perpetrators be brought to justice.

8. Further **calls upon** the GRP to continue to address the grave environmental problems of and around lake Lanao with a view to arrive at a speedy remedy for all its consequences.

9. **Urges** the MNLF and the MILF and all the other national components to unify their ranks and rally their efforts and act jointly for the Bangsamoro people's peace and development, and **requests** the Secretary General to contribute his good offices for the achievement of their unity and reconciliation.

10. **Invites** the Secretary General to appoint a special representative to follow-up the efforts of restoring peace to the Southern Philippines, in collaboration with the parties concerned.

11. **Urges** the Member States, subsidiary organs, affiliated and specialized institutions as well as charitable Islamic organizations in the Member States to increase their medical, humanitarian, economic, financial and technical assistance for the development and rehabilitation of Southern Philippines through the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in order to accelerate the completion of the social and economic development.

12. **Requests** the Secretary General to follow up the implementation of this resolution and to report thereon to the Thirty-fourth Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Source: Organization of Islamic Conference

SAMMY P. MAULANA

The Philippine Crisis and its Implication to the Bangsamoro

Savvy discussion on the current state of Philippine governance has pooled civil society organizations (CSOs) into two opposing blocs. There are those who contend that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo should step down or resign due to the "Hello Garci Tape Scam" and those who are continually seeking moral discernment for their political decisions.

Even the business sector also expressed disgust and discontent with the Arroyo administration on its inability to offer a viable long-term, way-out solution to the continuing political and economic crisis.

In the Philippine democracy, political freedom is both expressed and suppressed and to some extent, curtailed. Constitutional guarantees abound over freedom of expression including the right of the people to peacefully assemble and freely express their grievances against the government. These rights should not only be protected by the national laws but should also be recognized, enforced and protected. This includes also the right of the peoples organizations (POs) and NGOs to unite and to collectively air out their social and political concerns, more so on major political issues especially related to the legitimacy of national leadership.

However, since freedom comes both from the duty-holder and the right holder, much of these political rights are being diversely interpreted and questioned even by the government itself.

The right to assemble is equated to peaceful assembly. The government gives no space for demonstrators or rallyists to freely seek redress on issues affecting their lives whether though criticism, mobilization or mass action or even in the form of prayerful gathering. The government sees civil disobedience as a threat to national security.

On the other hand, the personal representation of organizations, which are critical to the government, are viewed as "personal interests". In view of this situation, there is a need to answer two questions: "whose interest do the POs and the CSOs represent and advance?" and "whose vested interest does EO 464, CPR or PP1017 protect and preserve?"

In Mindanao, various sectors have different positions on the national leadership. As the "Gloriagate Scandal" polarized, some POs and NGOs had joined efforts to call for the resignation or ouster of President Arroyo and offered alternatives as way-out formula for the political crisis after she steps down. Some adopted a "wait and see posture" before taking any course of action.

Because of the seeming lack of general pictures of what is happening to the country, the **Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS)** hosted a forum with some 35 leaders of its network members with an end-view of adopting a united stand on the "Gloriagate Scandal".

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While believing on the legitimacy of the issue and the loss of moral authority of President Arroyo to lead the country, the participants arrived at a conclusion that "whoever is the president, this government cannot render good governance, more so, to address the legitimate demand of the Bangsamoro for the recovery of their homeland and the restoration of its system of governance, which they believe was subverted and usurped by the present political system.

cultural, economic and political welfare. In the current peace talks with the government, the issue is "not what the government can give to the Bangsamoro," but rather "what the government can return to the Bangsamoro."

The recent development in the GRP-MILF Peace Talks is an obvious indication that the government has no room for the Bangsamoro aspiration. While the issue to be resolved is political in nature, the government confines itself to

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With these premises, the participants have agreed to form the **Free Bangsamoro Coalition** and adopted a manifesto " to rekindle the struggle of the Bangsamoro" for the "right to self-determination" both as a people and as a nation.

In entertaining the thought of having peace talks with the government, the Bangsamoro is not begging anything from the government. What they want is the recognition and respect of its inalienable right to freely decide its social, its constitutionality and is hell-bent to invoke its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

As the late Great Imam and Amir of the Bangsamoro has postulated, "for us to be free, let us first be independent and for us to be independent, let us be free." Let us share this passage to the patriotic and freedom-loving Bangsamoro as a daily reminder in the pursuit of a dignified society and human existence.

UPDATES ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Kadtuntaya Foundation, Inc. (KFI), together with **Bread for the World**, has started the Phase 2 of the ***Mapayag, Adaon, Kiladap Integrated Area Development*** (MADAKIL-IAD), with the aim of improving the living condition of poor farmers in Talitay, Maguindanao. It will target a total of 206 Maguindanaon households in 8 sitios. Integrated in this livelihood and income generation project are components of peace building and good governance; capability-building and marketing; farming enterprise and land tenure improvement.

The ***Expansion of a Development Programme for Indigenous People in Ampatuan, Maguindanao Province*** is on its Phase III, funded by **MISEREOR**. Barangays Saniag and Tomicor in Ampatuan are targeted to gradually convert production practices to sustainable agricultural practices and to improve marketing of crops. Through the use fo good governance and peacebuilding instruments, community relationships will be forged and participatory governance activated.

In Datu Odin Sinsuat and North Upi, seven barangays will benefit from the ***Maguindanao Upland Agricultural Integrated Development Program*** (MOLU-IAD) Phase 3, funded by **TROCAIRE**, which should benefit from interventions that guarantee food security, improve health conditions and promote harmonious relationship among the tri-people population while taking gender balance into consideration.

The ***Enhancing Peacebuilding Work in Carmen Towards Economic Development***, funded by the **German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)** is now on its terminal phase. After a year of community organizing and capability-building measures, the barangays of Langogan, Pebpoloan and Kimadzil, whose population are a mix of Moros and Manobos, are now ready to declare their communities as Zones of Peace.

The Bangsamoro Journal is the official publication of the **Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS)** – a network of Bangsamoro non-government and people's organizations operating in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and in some parts of Mindanao where the Bangsamoro are dominant.

The publication of The Bangsamoro Journal is made possible through the assistance of **Stiftung Für Kinder (Foundation for Children)** – a non-profit institution based in Germany institution supporting children especially those who are living in the countries under the Third World.

Stiftung für Kinder