

Proceedings of a Roundtable Discussion



Peace, Autonomy, and Democracy in Mindanao.



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“Peace, Autonomy and Democracy in Mindanao” RTD Proceedings

In his inaugural address, President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III provided an insight on how he plans to deal with the decades long conflict in Mindanao: “My government will be sincere in dealing with all the peoples of Mindanao. We are committed to a peaceful and just settlement of conflicts, inclusive of the interests of all – may they be Lumads, Bangsamoro or Christian.” Many peace stakeholders welcomed this statement from President Aquino III, who swept into office on the wave of the people’s discontent over the corruption and excesses of the previous administration, and the promise of reform.

In his State of the Nation address, he reiterated this principle when he said: “Armed conflict can only be achieved through peaceful political negotiations.” He added that the government plans to resume the talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) after Ramadan. This was welcomed by the MILF in a statement; “Coming from the Chief Executive himself, his pronouncement that the peace talks would resume after the Ramadan gives hope to the people of Mindanao when it comes to the peace process.”

But three months after the end of Ramadan, the negotiations have not yet resumed and a string of controversies have plunged the peace talks to uncertainty.

Complicating the peace situation is the deficit of good governance in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. An ADB Report (2002) for instance, noted that while more than three fourths of the budget of ARMM goes to personnel costs, “this expenditure does not translate into service delivery owing to inefficiencies in systems and procedures for human resource management, insufficient focus on performance, and a tendency for appointments to be politically influenced” (ADB, 2002: p. 4). As a result many have called for its outright abolition. An alternative recommendation is to create two autonomous regions---one for the mainland and one for the island provinces.

This has also led many to call for a postponement of the elections for the ARMM Regional Government.

When will the peace talks resume? Will the August 2011 ARMM elections push through? What reform is necessary to make ARMM-RG work? Or is it time to call for its abolition?

These are some of the questions that faced Muslim leaders who gathered in a roundtable discussion on “Peace Autonomy, and Democracy in Mindanao. The RTD, organized by the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy (PCID) and supported by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), was held last December 3-4, 2010 at the Linden Suites, Ortigas Center.

In her opening remarks, PCID President Amina Rasul noted the fact that President Aquino III, who lost in a number of Christian-dominated provinces in Mindanao, won in all the ARMM provinces during the May 2010 elections. She emphasized that this represents the hope among Muslim voters that President Aquino III will focus on achieving lasting and genuine peace in the region.

With the peace talks still help up three months after Ramadan, Rasul explained that it is important for leaders in Muslim Mindanao to provide valuable inputs in order to help move the process forward.

She added that given the myriad of problems in ARMM---bad governance, conflict, human rights violations among others---it is high time to ask a critical question: has ARMM lived up to its promises?

Warriors for Peace?

Retired Lt. Gen. Benjamin Muhammad Dolorfino began his assessment of the security situation in Mindanao by saying that “his heart will always belong to Mindanao” owing to the fact that he spent 29 years of his military service there.

Dolorfino described the Mindanao conflict as a “low intensity conflict situation.” It is not a war among nations, but rather a war among people. Low intensity conflict situations, unlike high-intensity and mid-intensity conflict situations, do not call for the employment of much military force. According to Dolorfino, in these situations, “it is very hard to use force because if you are not careful you will also harm innocent civilians. This tells us you cannot use arms and bombs in the battle for the hearts and the minds of people.”

The former head of the Western Mindanao Command, who just recently retired from military service, stressed that there is a need to rethink the traditional notion of security as myopically referring to the freedom from physical and mental harm. Dolorfino, who is a convert to Islam, batted for a “broad, multidimensional” concept of security that focuses on human security. He defined security as a “state or condition wherein the people and their institutions are free from violence; they are free to engage in productive enterprises; their human rights and civil liberties are respected at all times; and their welfare, well-being, way of life and environment are always protected and enhanced.”

He said that this broader conception should be reflected in how the soldiers view their role in society. He said that while soldiers are traditionally viewed

as warriors, the complex problems in Mindanao and the multidimensionality of security issues should make them realize that “conflicts are not fought and won with arms alone.” This, he said, can easily be demonstrated by the fact that billions of pesos in military budget and decades of military operations conducted by military officers who have been trained in the best local and foreign academies have failed to achieve victory against rebel forces.

Dolorfino explained that given this paradigm of security in Mindanao, situated in a low intensity conflict, the military has an important peace-building function. The so-called Mindanao Problem requires what he described as a “Whole Society Approach.” This approach entails the collaboration among three stakeholders, namely, civil society, the local government, and the armed forces. To illustrate why the problem requires this treatment he compared the Mindanao problem to a tree comprised of three parts. Dolorfino likened the leaves and branches of tree to the different threat groups in Mindanao, where the leaves are the members of these groups, and the branches are their leaders. The roots of the tree represent the multidimensional problems: the military, political, socioeconomic and conventional factors.

The soldiers cannot destroy the roots of the problem but they can remove the branches. Dolorfino said that there are key leaders who must be eliminated. Continuing his metaphor, he said this would cut the leaves away from the roots of the problem, and thereby stabilize the situation, to allow for multi-stakeholder-processes to solve the problem. Dolorfino envisions society as a trinity, with the People, the Government, and the Armed Forces. As long as the sides of the trinity interact and support one another, there will be success in the peace efforts. The Armed Forces can serve as bridges and catalysts for multi-stakeholder-processes, linking local government units and civil society organizations, so that they may form partnerships and collaborate to solve local issues and concerns.

Dolorfino’s proposition was met with strong reactions from some of the participants, who do not believe that the military should have, or are even

capable of having, a peace building function. According to Atty. Anwar Malang, chair of the Mindanao Human Rights Action Center, soldiers are built for war. They train for combat and warfare. That being the case, why must we use them for peace building, when that is not their function? One participant even went so far as to maintain that the AFP should be abolished.

Dolorfino, however, maintained his position, and underscored the collaborative aspect of his proposal. He stressed that the military understands the situation in a way that the civilian government and its people cannot, and added that civil military operations are still aspects of military functions.

Ms. Amina Rasul added that the AFP has begun consultations to look at their own security considerations, and has begun doing serious consultations with civilians. There have been three consultations with civil service organizations, in Davao, Zamboanga and Baguio. She said that if there is a chance of having even more engagements with the AFP, then people should do so, especially in areas affected by conflict.

“Complicated Mess”

Dr. Santanina Rasul, the last Muslim to ever win a Senate seat, emphasized that “almost 20 years and 5 governors later, the Muslim communities and their residents are no better off than before they became autonomous.” She said that ARMM provinces are poorest of the poor in the entire country and that it is time to acknowledge, “the complicated mess the region is in.”

She urged Muslim leaders to be “open minded and be activists for progress”. In calling for vision and activism in confronting the daunting problems of Mindanao, Dr. Rasul, quoting a Muslim thinker, said, “activism without vision is doomed from start...vision without activism quickly becomes irrelevant.

Dr. Rasul, who currently chairs the Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc (MKFI), also stressed the importance of Islamic values and education. No reform in the political and administrative system in ARMM could ever be successful unless the leaders and citizens in ARMM internalize Islamic values.

Islamic Values

Many participants share this view when they commented that the problems in Muslim Mindanao sometimes seems to indicate that there is an absence of Islamic values in the region. In light of the Maguindanao Massacre and other killings, corruption, a few roundtable participants surmised that perhaps there should be a reversion to traditional Islamic values in ARMM. According to one participant, three of the important concepts in Islam are consultation, justice, and freedom of thought and expression. But in ARMM, he observed, none of these basic tenets are practiced, or are present in the ARMM government. There is no consultation in the appointment of government officials. There is no justice: if a party is related to an official, then that party will win his case. There is no freedom of expression: if a person stands up to an official with power in ARMM, he will get killed. Moreover, people who were instilled with Islamic values could not have committed an atrocity such as the Maguindanao Massacre. So, perhaps having more teachers of Islamic values could improve the situation on the ground.

Is Federalism the Answer?

There are three generally accepted political options in addressing the problem in Mindanao---independence, autonomy and federalism. Even among Muslim leaders, independence remains an ideal while autonomy (at least the problematic kind implemented with ARMM) has not produced the promised dividends to the people of Muslim communities. This has led many to advocate for a federal system of government.

In 2009, with the intention of speeding up the economic development of the nation, and addressing the cause of rebellion in the land, particularly the Moro centuries-old rebellion, then Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Jr. filed a resolution, supported by a dozen administration and opposition senators, calling for a shift to a federal system of government.

Sen. Pimentel, the acknowledged “father of local government,” emphasized that the solution to problems of conflict and underdevelopment in the south is to disperse power – political and economic – throughout the nation, and the most concrete way of doing this is to convert the country into a federal republic.

In his proposal, Muslim Mindanao would not be the only region in the nation gaining greater autonomy from the national government. The entire country would be divided into several federal states. According to Pimentel, this is a more viable solution, because it is less objectionable to the rest of the nation than the proposition that only Muslim Mindanao would be a separate state.

Pimentel has been promoting this idea mainly for two reasons: first, it will dissipate unrest. One of the major issues in the Mindanao conflict is that of identity. Pimentel has heard young Muslim people tell him they would rather die in the battlefield than die, having lost their identity. Under this federal system, the issue of identity is addressed, because each federal state would introduce its own laws, which would be implemented within their respective states. Therefore, the government within the Muslim Mindanao state would be empowered to implement Sharia’h. Pimentel mentioned, however, that there may be some limitations as to the types of laws that might be implemented in so far as Sharia’h is concerned. He doubted that the rest of Philippine society, having been exposed to certain democratic processes for so long, would accept penalties that involve stoning, or the severing of a convict’s hand.

Another reason federalization would help dissipate unrest is that it would guarantee regional representation in the national government. Pimentel noted that there has not been a single representative who was either Muslim, or from ARMM, since Senator Rasul’s last term ended in 1998.

Pimentel’s second reason for advocating federalization is that it will speed up economic development in Mindanao. He emphasized that federalism does not only disperse political but also economic power. Federal states, with certain limitations, would be allowed to contract agreements with other states.

Sen. Pimentel concluded by saying that the best way to introduce this change in the Philippine Constitution would be through a constitutional assembly. He argued that the assembly, compared to a Constitutional Convention, would not have the power to perpetuate itself, as a definite term may be legislated on, within which the assembly would have to perform its task.

The federal idea is not without its critics though as reflected in the comments during the open forum. They questioned the capabilities of ARMM to operate as an independent state, as well as whether the elements necessary for federation are currently present in ARMM.

Engineer Don Arbison Loong, formerly the Provincial Administrator Sulu, expressed several reservations. He pointed out that, under a federal system, states are supposed to be more self-sufficient. He then questioned whether ARMM could truly be self-sufficient, considering that it almost entirely dependent on its internal revenue allocation (IRA) from the national government. He also believed that it would be unfair to expect ARMM to be a self-sufficient region, just like any other state within the federal system, when so much money had already been spent building up the infrastructure in the rest of the country, and not in ARMM. Along similar lines, he wondered who, in a federal system, would be responsible for repaying previous loans, considering that those loans were mostly spent outside ARMM.

Loong also noted a structural flaw that is a great impediment to the development of ARMM and any of its infrastructure projects. ARMM is not included in the national framework of development, having been separated from the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). Because of this separation, ARMM must always stay within its yearly IRA, its basic operational funds. Other local governments throughout the Philippines, on the other hand, can avail of multi-year credit loans, and thus can commit money for development and infrastructure projects.

Professor Moner Bajunaid, of the National Commission of Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) expressed difficulty in seeing how the Philippines would federalize, considering that it is a single independent state. He asked whether there is a model wherein an already independent state federated from within, as opposed to several independent states federating together. Pimentel answered that, when India federated, although some of the states were somewhat independent, many parts of India were not. And, in any case, there is no rule that says a unitary country cannot federalize.

More problematic questions were posed by the roundtable participants: Does ARMM have the elements necessary to function as a federal state? Are the right leaders being selected to govern ARMM? If the answer to that is no, then will federalization worsen the warlord situation in Mindanao?

The question of whether ARMM possesses the necessary elements for federalization may have to be examined further. As for whether the warlord situation would be worse under a federalized ARMM, the same should not be a major cause of resistance to a federal system. Pimentel reminded the roundtable that federalization was not intended to remedy all the ailments of Muslim Mindanao, or indeed, the nation.

While Pimentel advocated for federalization, one member of the roundtable discussion disagreed with the perception that there is something fundamentally wrong with the governmental structure of ARMM. The former governor of ARMM, Dr. Parouk Hussin, maintained that ARMM was the best thing that had ever happened to Mindanao. He believes that, given the right leaders in place, the current system could work and should not be abolished. One of the big obstacles to running ARMM successfully, in his experience, is the lack of resources. However, during his incumbency, he focused his efforts on obtaining aid from the international community. Through this, he was able to find funds that the national government was unable or unwilling to give to ARMM.

Yusuf Ledesma, spokesperson for Balik Islam Unity Congress, noted that although dependency on foreign aid is not ideal, it is certainly more preferable than “being run like hell” by the government in Manila.

Attorney Edilwasif Baddiri, Commissioner of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, noted that ARMM is a microcosm of the Philippine political arena. Of course it has problems, in terms of structure and leadership. The Republic itself has structural problems, because we copied the governmental structure of the United States of America, without including the part about states. The government is designed not to function efficiently. Baddiri compared the Philippines with its neighbors in Asia, wherein the system is either one-party or one-man-rules. He observed that they have had good leaders who were empowered to move their countries forward.

Root Causes

Perhaps no roundtable discussion on peace, democracy, and autonomy in Muslim Mindanao would be complete without its touching upon the topic of what, exactly, constitutes the root cause of the “Mindanao Problem”. Dolorfino submitted that there were, in fact, four roots to the Mindanao Problem: military, political, socioeconomic, and conventional factors.

Several participants agreed that one of the primary issues was one of identity. Atty. Baddiri said the Bangsamoro identity is actually the result of military operations and aggressions. However, he recognized that identity is not static, and postured that, perhaps 10 years from now, if there is peace in Mindanao, and no massacres, perhaps then Moros would identify with the rest of the Philippines.

Senator Rasul submitted that, whatever the cause, we cannot institute political reform without first reforming our educational system and our social institutions. We need to have dialogue, and we must begin by opening the way for dialogue among ourselves. As Muslims and Moros, we must accept that

there are internal differences even within our collective body. Therefore we must create political and social conditions which are conducive to dialogue, to open the doors for the articulation of differences within the Muslim community. This may, in turn, allow the Muslims to recognize the heterogeneity of others; to view non-Muslims as a multiple assembly of various ideas, interests and values that may be in conflict with each other, and that may be common to ours.

Atty. Anwar Malang responded to these submissions by forcefully stating that to say that the root is socioeconomic, or one of education, is to skirt and trivialize the issue. He maintained that the heart of the conflict lies in the Bangsamoro people's quest for self-determination, and that superficial problems cannot resolve this main root of the problem in Mindanao. To him, working on improved education is something that will come later, after the main issues have been resolved.

Engr. Loong said that some people get emotional when others talk of economic and socioeconomic as being the root of the problem; they say it's political, it's religious. But in Loong's opinion, when parents see their children not going to school because of conflict, or poverty, then they know that these things are important. According to Loong, the bottom line is an economic one, and the economy of Muslim communities must be improved.

Interfaith Dialog

Another issue touched upon by the group is that of interfaith dialogue. A participant mentioned that currently, the Interfaith Council is, administratively, under the National Security Council, which is the policy-making and advisory body for matters connected with national defense. This is troubling, for obvious reasons. Why is interfaith dialogue a matter of national security? The participants asked what should be done about this, and how they were supposed to react to such a state of affairs, where the government believes that interfaith dialogue is properly placed within the realm of national security. grouped together with culture and education.

Mr. Musa Sanguila, a Regional Council Chair as well as Regional Coordinator of Shakuntala Vaswani, insisted that we cannot simply disregard this categorization of the Interfaith Council as a National Security issue. He said we should push the administration to move it, perhaps to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, or ask that another office be created.

For his part, as a former military man, Dolorfino believed that all agencies should participate in the maintenance of national security, in the multidimensional sense. Nonetheless, he agreed that the Interfaith Council should be removed from National Security, and that it would be more appropriately Professor Moner Bajunaid shared with the group a program he has been promoting in Mindanao, called DEAL, which stands for Dialogue, Education, Accommodation, and Love. He said that continuing, persistent dialogue should be waged, as part of advocating a peaceful movement that will erase the current of bias against Muslims.

Peace Talks

All the members of the roundtable discussion were of the conviction that peace talks form an essential part in solving the conflict in Mindanao. However, they were also all alarmed at the current standstill in the peace talks. The recent developments make many stakeholders question the sincerity of the government in its desire to achieve peace. One participant went so far as to ask, “Is the government serious about peace? Is the government serious about development? Then where are they?”

The participants had many suggestions as to what would contribute to the success of the peace talks. All the participants agreed that for the negotiations to proceed, there must be a strong indication that both parties are sincere. Senator Pimentel added that autonomy has several components, and that, in order for the negotiations to lead to peace, the socioeconomic component of

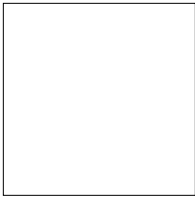
autonomy must be addressed. The government must already know what it wants to offer in the negotiations. Moreover, the negotiations cannot be with only the MILF. The approach must be holistic, and include all the Muslim and Moro stakeholders in the negotiations.

Senator Rasul recalled that when the peace talks between the government and the MNLF were facilitated by Indonesia, they were a tremendous success. She suggested that this should be a cue for our government to analyze why they were successful, and learn from the Indonesian experience.

Proceedings. It should be: Peace, Autonomy, and Democracy in Mindanao.

SPEAKERS' PROFILES

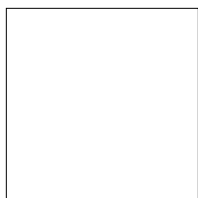
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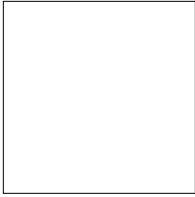
SENATOR AQUILINO Q. PIMENTEL, JR. Fearless parliamentarian. Fightingest mayor. Stalwart of democracy. These are but some of the sobriquets given to our esteemed guest this evening in his years of public service. He has been called other names by his detractors, including Don Quixote de Pimentel for his courageous but sometimes lonely battle against a dictator, corruption in government, electoral fraud and even foreign imperialism. What sticks in the mind more, however, is the reputation that he, as a public official and private individual, has earned for fearlessness, incorruptibility, integrity and honesty. He was a SENATOR of the Republic from 2004-2010 where he served as Senate Minority Leader. Cited annually by mass media, civic and religious organizations as Outstanding Senator, our speaker has authored and co-sponsored several landmark legislations including:

1. Republic Act No. 7160, The Local Government Code of 1991.
2. Republic Act No. 6938, The Cooperative Code.
3. Republic Act No. 6678, The Generic Drugs Act.
4. Republic Act No. 6847, The Philippine Sports Commission Act.
5. Republic Act No. 6975, An Act Establishing the Philippine National Police under a reorganized Department of the Interior and Local Government.
6. The People's Small-Scale Mining Act. The law allows small-scale miners to lawfully engage in mining activities.
7. Republic Act No. 6734, An Act Creating the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Today, he is busy with the Senator Aquilino Q Pimentel Jr. Center for Local Governance, a unit within the College of Governance and Public Policy, University of Makati, is envisioned to be a premier provider of world-class education in governance studies.



SENATOR SANTANINA TILLAH RASUL was born in the island municipality of Siasi, province of Sulu. She obtained her Bachelors degree in Political Science (Cum laude) from the University of the Philippines and her Masteral degree in National Security Administration from the National Defense College of the Philippines. In 1991, she was awarded the “Most Distinguished Alumni of the Year Award” by the UP Alumni Association. She joined government service as a public school teacher in 1952. She has held various positions in government representing Muslim and Cultural Minorities: Commissioner, National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) 1976-1985; Member, Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television (1982-1985); Member, UNESCO Philippine Commission (1986-1989); Member Textbook Board, Ministry of Education, culture and Sports in 1986. She was elected Senator of the Republic of the Philippines in 1987 and re- elected in 1992, the first Muslim woman so elected, and the first Muslim re-elected to the Senate. She is credited with a number of landmark legislations among which were laws that sought to provide security of tenure in government service; level the playing field for those seeking government service; removing all vestiges of discrimination against women and opening the Philippine Military Academy to women. She is well known for her NGO work as founder of a number of multi-awarded foundations/programs such as the Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc., Bantay Dagat Inc., Kasannangan Foundation, Inc., and Muslim Professional & Business Women Association of the Philippines, Inc. In recognition of her work in promoting literacy in the Philippines, she was appointed by UNESCO as its “Honorary Ambassador” during the International Literacy Year (ILY) in 1990.

**LT.GEN. MOHAMMAD BENJAMIN DOLORFINO**

Lieutenant General Ben D Dolorfino was born on November 10, 1954 in Dumangas, Iloilo where he got his primary, elementary and secondary education. He was taking up Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering at the University of San Agustin, Iloilo City when he was appointed as a cadet to the Philippine Military Academy on April 1, 1972. He graduated on February 17, 1976 with a Bachelor of Science degree and received his commission as Ensign in the Philippine Navy.

Lieutenant General Dolorfino holds a Master Degree in National Security Administration from the National Defense College of the Philippines where he graduated at the top of his class on July 29, 2000. He is a graduate of the Amphibious Warfare Course, and Command and Staff Course from the United States Marine Corps Combat Development Command in Quantico, Virginia, USA.

He is a recipient two (2) Philippine Legion of Honor Medals (Degree of Officer and Commander), five (5) Distinguished Service Stars Medal, Distinguished Aviation Cross Medal, Bronze Cross Medal, Silver Wing Medal, Gawad sa Kaunlaran Medal, Civic Action Medal, sixteen (16) Military Merit Medal, four (4) Military Commendation Medals and numerous Letters of Commendation and Plaques of Appreciation. He is a recipient of the prestigious Ateneo de Zamboanga University Peace Award on February 10, 2010 and the Mindanao Peace Weavers Peace Award on November 28, 2010.

He is popularly known by his Muslim name, Mohammad Benjamin Dolorfino and proudly introduces himself as a convert to Islam.



AUTONOMY AND PEACE

By Santanina Tillah Rasul

Initially, I was not supportive of the Organic Act establishing Autonomy for Muslim Mindanao. I felt that Muslim Filipinos would be better off in a society where competence, rather than religion, would open opportunities for appointment to high office; where equity, rather than closeness to the powers that be should be the basis for allocation of resources; where national interests should be the primordial consideration of every citizen.

However, since there was a preponderance of support for the Organic Act, even by non-Muslim members of Congress, I added my support to its enactment.

Almost 20 years and 5 male governors later, the Muslim communities and their residents are no better off than they were before the region became autonomous. In fact some provincial governors would prefer to be let out of the ARMM, the reason being – the provinces were better off when there was no additional tier of bureaucracy above them. They were better off when they dealt directly with the national government. Likewise, national programs could not include the ARMM, even if the programs would benefit the regions since

the ARMM had its own cabinet and national officials did not want to offend the ARMM officials.

Today, the ARMM provinces are among the poorest of the poor in the country. Economists would refer to this region as a basket case. Peace and order have not improved. Kidnappings for ransom continue. In fact the ARMM provinces remain at the bottom rung insofar as human development is concerned.

I am glad that we are having these conversations. It is time to acknowledge the complicated mess this region is in and hopefully our conversations will lead to an optimistic but critical recommendation. We are not here to provide a convenient solution. We are here to help start the process towards a formation of a viable strategy that can provide a solution to the mess we see in the ARMM.

We need to criticize not because we have stopped being Moros but because we want to see the communities of which we are part, rise up to their highest potential of development; of peace; of justice; of pluralism. We seek to locate ourselves as part of that broader conversation and not to denigrate. We need to be open-minded and be activists for progress. However, to quote a Muslim thinker, "Activism without vision is doomed from the start. Vision without activism quickly becomes irrelevant".

In this connection, we commend the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy for its annual strategic planning sessions and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for its support of this annual exercise, which provides a venue for an honest and candid discussion of what ails Muslim Mindanao.

I think you will agree with me that before we can institute political reform in the region, we need to reform its educational system and its social institutions.

I recall, on the eve of the initialing of the Peace Agreement between the government and the MNLF in Jakarta, the talks hit a snag when the MNLF

proposed that the Philippine government, particularly the Department of Education, must recognize Islamic values. Instantaneously, the government technical panel objected saying that this proposal was unconstitutional. The debates were heated and went on for over 2 hours without either side giving in. It was already past midnight and the initialing of the peace agreement was scheduled that morning.

Finally, the Indonesian chairman of the talks, Ambassador Wirayuda, who later became Foreign Minister of Indonesia, stood up and announced that he was going to inform his principal, foreign Minister Ali Al Atas, that there was no Peace Agreement to be initialed. President Suharto and the OIC were supposed to witness the initialing that morning. I intervened and ventured an observation – reminding everyone that the Philippine Constitution recognizes cultural diversity and that the MNLF proposal for government to recognize Islamic values is nothing more than a proposal to recognize Filipino values. So the recognition of Islamic values was included in the Peace Agreement. The Final Peace Agreement was later signed in Malacanang on September 2, 1996 with President Ramos and the OIC as witnesses. What has happened since then?

The educational system of the ARMM failed to implement effectively that hotly debated provision whereby government recognizes Islamic values. In fact the teaching of Islamic values, I understand included Metro Manila, even at the start, in communities where sizeable number of Muslims reside. The teaching of Islamic values while started in the ARMM was not effective, for a number of reasons.

It seems, even the leaders of the ARMM have not internalized Islamic values, otherwise the Maguindanao massacre would not have taken place.

Let's go back to the creation of the ARMM. What was the point of creating an autonomous region for Muslims? It was to give autonomy to the Muslims so

that that they can govern themselves in accordance with Islam. Are the Muslim living better lives because of the autonomy? Are the Muslims in the ARMM living lives in accordance with Islam? These are some questions that need to be asked.

If you go to the Greenhills shopping center you will notice a preponderance of Muslim traders, more than 500 of them, plying their businesses in Greenhills. They have left their original places of abode for security reasons and also to be able to earn a living.

Despite the painfully and brutally obvious suffering inflicted upon the Muslims, we have not been able to communicate our pain and our anxieties to our fellow Filipinos because we think of them as outside our sphere. We have effectively exiled ourselves from the rest of the Filipino nation. We need to have dialogue.

However, in order to engage in any meaningful dialogue, Muslims must first begin by opening the way for dialogue among ourselves. This can only happen if we learn to accept that there are internal differences within our collective body. The reality is – that Muslim society is heterogeneous. This reality has been suppressed/ignored by conservatives who fear dissent and heterodoxy on the grounds that these would undermine the unity of the ummah.

But we need to realize that pluralism is a fact of life and is a feature that is found in all cultures, civilizations, and belief systems and is not unique to Islam. To suppress these internal voices and energies does not erase or negate their presence; they merely mutate and give rise to a multiplicity of voices/movements.

We need to create the political and social conditions conducive to dialogue so that we may open the doors for the articulation of differences within the Muslim community. Rather than to present to ourselves and others a homogenous community, we need to recognize the varying ideas and thoughts that constitute our complex ummah.

Recognizing the heterogeneity within ourselves opens the way for us to recognize the heterogeneity of others as well. It would mean that we would be able to look at non-Muslims as a multiple assembly of various ideas, interests and values that may be in conflict with each other. This may also help us realize that in the midst of this confusing and complex heterogeneity there are also values, beliefs and ideas common to ours. For example, the poor in Muslim Mindanao may come to realize that their poverty (although extreme) is also shared by others outside the ummah. Muslim women will also realize that their problems are common and shared by women outside the frontier of their faith community.

The recognition, that there are commonalities should help build effective collaborative coalitions and alliances that may actually help us Muslims get our point of view across. At the same time, it will help us better understand the point of view of non-Muslims. Only then can Muslims work hand in hand with non-Muslims on matters that affect us. An example is the partnership of the PPCRV and the NUCP. The Ulama, tired of the ARMM being called the cheating capital of the Philippine, volunteered as a partner of the PPCRV, a catholic based entity to monitor elections in the ARMM through a MOA. And this brings us to "A Comon Word".

During an interfaith dialogue in Geneva last month, organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Islamic Call Society (WICS) and Prince Ghazi of Jordan, the prince spoke of A Common Word. This is a position paper prepared by 138 Muslim scholars in reaction to a speech delivered by Pope Benedict in Germany and which was deemed offensive by the World Muslim Community.

A Common Word initiative focuses on "Love of God" and "Love of Neighbor" as a commonality between Christianity and Islam and can be used as common ground for peaceful relations. After 3 years of various conferences it has emerged, theologically speaking, that Muslims and Christians do share "Love of

God” and “Love of Neighbor” at the heart of their religions even if this may be interpreted differently.

“For both religions, Islam and Christianity – harming religious minorities among us is evil: is absolutely forbidden and is ultimately a rejection of God’s love and a crime against God himself. We are, therefore, bound by our own religions to defend each other in such a context.”

On September 23, 2010, King Abdullah of Jordan proposed before the United Nations General Assembly the establishment of a World Interfaith Harmony. On October 20, 2010 the UN General Assembly ,upon the recommendation of Jordan, unanimously approved a UN resolution establishing the World Interfaith Harmony Week and proclaimed the first week of February of every year the World Interfaith Harmony Week among all religions, faiths and beliefs.

The objectives behind the UN resolution are:

1. “To counter inter-religious tension, mistrust, dislike and hatred by coordinating and uniting efforts of all interfaith groups doing positive work to increase their collective momentum.
2. To harness and utilize the collective might of the world’s second largest infrastructure, the places of worship – (the largest being that of education) specifically for peace and harmony in the world.
3. To permanently and regularly encourage the silent majority of preachers (and Imams) to declare themselves for peace and harmony and providing a ready-made vehicle for them to do so.”

Definitely, the UN resolution broadens the principle of A Common Word. This resolution will help promote the alleviation of interfaith problems before they filter down into the oppression of minorities. As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”.

Of course it will take time for people of different religions to love their neighbors but insha-allah this can be done.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer in an article which appeared in its December 2 issue (yesterday) mentioned Indonesia as a model of tolerance towards the country's minorities – Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Chinese. Of the 10 ASEAN countries, only Indonesia has been given a passing grade as a really “free” country by the Freedom House. The largely Catholic Philippines lags behind Indonesia in providing basic democratic rights to their people. American policy makers have looked to Indonesia as a model for the rest of the Muslim World.

What can we learn from Indonesia?

The most important lesson is that Islamic organizations can provide the backbone of a tolerant civil society. The Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, both mass Islamic Institutions and the 2 biggest Muslim organizations in the world, have spoken for decades, for democracy and pluralism.

Religion permeates, almost every aspect of life in Indonesia, including politics. However, political parties, which spouse the implementation of Shariah have lost in successive elections. Rather than taking over the state, Islamist parties have been forced by the electorate to alter their policies to give importance to Indonesian pluralism.

When the peace talks between the government and the MNLF was facilitated by Indonesia, the talks were a tremendous success. This should be a cue for our government to analyze why the Peace Talks were successful and learn from the Indonesian experience.

Thank you.



Federalizing the Republic: The Ultimate Basis for a Just and Lasting Peace in Central and Southern Mindanao'

Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Jr.

The proposal to adopt the federal form of government is meant primarily to provide the foundation for a just and lasting peace in central and southern Mindanao and secondarily to provide an equal opportunity for the development of the regions of the country to counter the perception, if not the reality, that Metro Manila is favored over other regions in matters of development.

Vital distinction

The search for a just and lasting peace in central and southern Mindanao has proven to be intractable over the last five centuries. The Spanish and American colonizers had failed to bring peace to the area. Indeed, even our own government has not solved the recurrent Moro armed uprisings in that part of Mindanao.

The reason is that the various governments have tended to oversimplify the so-called Moro problem and they have thus proposed superficial solutions that merely scratch the surface but do not address the fundamental issues inherent in the problem.

Our government's response to the armed challenges of the Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, for instance, is a good example. In its response to the twin problems posed by the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF, the government has blurred the distinction - a vital one - that divides the two groups into a gang of cut-throat hooligans, on the one hand, and a band of armed revolutionary partisans, on the other.

The Abu Sayyaf has used its guns to pursue a criminal agenda specializing in kidnapping, murder, arson, torture and other heinous crimes. The MILF has used its guns to advance a political agenda, secession or independence.

Parenthetically, I believe that the MILF call for secession or independence is merely a bargaining chip, that means that it is negotiable.

Recognizing the difference

If a meaningful solution is to be provided to the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF challenges, we must begin by recognizing that the two groups are different from each other and should, thus, be treated differently.

The Abu Sayyaf should be dealt with as a police matter, which means that the police should go after these hoodlums hammer and thongs and bring them before the bar of justice.

The MILF should be dealt with as a political matter, which means that the government should exert every effort to bring them back to the negotiating table and discuss all possible avenues that will lead to a just and lasting peace to the region that is now wracked by violent unrest.

The distinction bears underscoring because, as said earlier, even the government treats the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF as one and same brutal gang simply because their adherents are for the most part Moros or Muslims.

As a consequence of that wrongful premise, resort to the gun primarily to overcome the problems posed by both the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf is gaining currency among the people as demonstrated by the rising popularity rating of the president.

Gun-point policy, anathema to peace

There is, thus, a need to remind ourselves that the gun has never succeeded in establishing peace in central and southern Mindanao. The historical experience of our country bears out this conclusion.

For almost four hundred years, the Spanish colonial government (1521-1898) attempted to impose its will by force upon the Moros in central and southern Mindanao. They failed. For almost fifty years, the American commonwealth government (1898-1946), tried to do the same by force and guile. They did not quite succeed. And for the last fifty-four years, our own independent government (1946 to the present) has been struggling to address the same problem. Neither have we had much success.

In my own limited experience, alone, I recall four incidents involving the government's resort to force to counter and suppress Moro armed uprisings in central and southern Mindanao. In all four incidents, the just and lasting peace desired by the government had failed to materialize.

Dimakaling of Lanao

As boy in short pants, I remember a ballad about Dimakaling who had led a rebellion against the American regime to demand a different treatment for the Moros from that accorded to the rest of the people.

The American government called Dimakaling a bandit, ran after him, killed a lot of people and crushed his rebellion. Dimakaling was from Lanao in mainland Mindanao.

Kamlon of Sulu

When I was in high school, I remember the uprising of Kamlon against our government. Kamlon rallied his people to fight the government and assert the differentness, if there is such a word, of the Muslim people. The government had to send battalions of soldiers to capture Kamlon. After the loss of so many lives and the destruction of so many properties, the government managed to capture Kamlon, imprisoned him and ended his rebellion. Kamlon was from Sulu.

One would think that the sheer superiority of government guns that had crushed Dimakaling's and Kamlon's rebellions would have taught the Moros in Mindanao the futility and uselessness of rebelling against the government.

Udtog Matalam of Cotabato

Not so. For in my early years as a lawyer, I saw the eruption of another Moro rebellion in Mindanao. This time the armed uprising was led by Datu Udtog Matalam. Matalam's Mindanao Independence Movement said what his uprising was all about. It was anchored mainly on his grievance that the Moros of Mindanao and consequently Mindanao, itself, were discriminated against by 'imperial Manila'.

Again, the government unleashed its military might against Matalam. It was the first time I saw on TV a live newscast showing government howitzers shelling the rebels. Again, after causing the loss of several lives and destroying several properties, the government finally neutralized the Matalam rebellion. Matalam was from Cotabato.

Misuari of Sulu

Then, at the onset of the Marcos martial law years, another Moro armed uprising challenged the government. This time it was led by Nur Misuari of the Moro National Liberation Front.

The MNLF insurrection proved to be the longest lasting Moro led armed uprising (1973-1996), we have thus far witnessed as a people.

The government tried to use force to suppress the MNLF uprising. It did not work.

It was only after the MNLF war had killed more than 100,000 people and uprooted more than 200,000 people in the areas of conflict that the government realized that we should talk things over, not shoot it out, with the MNLF to bring peace to central and southern Mindanao.

The government, then, resorted to diplomacy and guile to bring the MNLF to the negotiating table. Misuari told me some days ago that he is probably the only rebel leader in the world who had signed three peace agreements with the very government he had been fighting against. But up to this very day, he feels betrayed by the government in that he says there are some provisions of the last peace agreement he had signed in Jakarta in 1996 that had been, to use his words, 'smuggled' into the treaty without his consent.

Misuari is from Sulu.

Now whether or not, Misuari is correct in his apprehensions about the integrity of the Jakarta peace agreement is one thing. At least for the moment, the Jakarta peace agreement holds, even if probably a little tenuously.

Guns spewing violence

Unfortunately, the applicability of the government peace agreement with the MNLF, notwithstanding, the guns of rebellion in central and southern Mindanao have not been silenced and are spewing violence as the current situation shows.

For as mentioned earlier, two armed challenges still confront the government in central and southern Mindanao in the armed banditry of the Abu Sayyaf and the armed rebellion of the MILF.

Eschewing sound analysis, the government has compounded the problem by lumping the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF together as if they are one and the same gang of cutthroats and by deciding to meet their challenges by a single approach: the use of an all out superior armed force to quell their uprisings.

Fundamental grievances

The position of the government is only partially correct and that is as far as the Abu Sayyaf is concerned. Certainly not as far as the MILF is concerned because as discussed earlier the two groups are miles apart in their objectives and methods of challenging the government. Moreover, the lessons of history teach us that the use of all out force against Moro arms has never brought and will never bring peace to central and southern Mindanao without a comprehensive plan that addresses not the seasonal, tribal complaints of the Tausugs or the Maranaos or the Magindanaos or any other Moro group but the fundamental grievances of the Bangsa Moro as a people.

This is not to say that the government should merely sit idly by while tribal Moro arms challenge it. The government, of course, has the right and the duty to assert its superiority over those who challenge it by the use of force. But the use of superior government arms should only be tactical, not strategic, in the matter of dealing with Moro armed uprisings.

Otherwise, the use of force will result only in establishing the peace of the graveyard, not the just and lasting peace that we all want for Mindanao and the rest of the country.

Divide and rule policy, ineffective

That the use of force has not solved the so-called Moro problem in central and southern Mindanao is plainly evident. In all the Moro uprisings that I have witnessed vicariously or actually, I have seen the government fail in bringing about a just and lasting peace in the area. As pointed out earlier, the government killed Dimakaling of Lanao; subdued Kamlon of Sulu; pacified Matalam of Cotabato, and alternately warred against and talked peace with Misuari of Sulu.

A clearer case against the use of force and of the tactic of divide and rule as a policy could hardly be established. But what is abundantly clear is that the policy of force and of divide-and-rule has never worked to achieve a just and lasting peace in central and southern Mindanao in the past.

Neither will it work today as against the MILF. Every day, the pages of the dailies and the air lanes of radio and television report killings that are obviously spawned by the violence unleashed by extremists of both sides of the war now raging in central and southern Mindanao.

What, then, is the solution?

Proposed solutions

I suggest the following steps: (a) in the short run, we have to declare a cease-fire; (b) in the middle run, we should negotiate with the MILF rebels, and bring development to Mindanao; and (c) in the long run, we have to offer to the Bangsa Moro a federal state of their own that will remain as a part of the federal republic.

Briefly, the proposal to adopt a federal form of government for the country will establish federal states to cover the various parts of the country.

Federal states

Luzon may have four federal states. One, the federal state of northern Luzon; two, the federal state of central Luzon; three, the federal state of southern Tagalog; and four, the federal state of Bicol. Metro-Manila may be converted into a special federal administrative center, like Washington, D.C., or Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

The Visayas may have three federal states. One, the federal state of eastern Visayas; two, the federal state of western Visayas; and three, the federal state of central Visayas.

Mindanao may have three federal states. One, the federal state of northern Mindanao; two, the federal state of northeastern Mindanao; and three, the federal state of the Bangsa Moro.

Sharing of powers

As for the powers of government, the federal states may have powers over matters that are not reserved to the federal republic. The powers of the federal republic may cover, among other things, foreign affairs, national defense, federal taxes, customs and immigration, basic education curriculum, basic justice.

Other powers may be assigned to the federal states, including primacy in matters of development, environment, local taxes and police

The enumeration is not all-inclusive or exclusive. In other words, the constitution will be final repository of what powers should be exercised by the federal republic, itself, and those powers that should be exercised by the federal states.

The constitution may also provide that certain powers be placed under the concurrent jurisdiction of the federal republic and the federal states. Whoever exercises a certain power first precludes the other from exercising it.

Effect on local governments

What will happen to the local governments if the federal form is adopted?

It depends on the way the constitution would deal with the matter. If the constitution would empower federal states to deal with local government units as they please, then, the present structure and powers of provinces, cities, municipalities and barangay - as we now know them - may be modified, retained or altogether abolished by the federal states.

Revision of the constitution

It is important to state that the adoption of the federal form of government needs the revision of the constitution. And that to my mind is the hardest obstacle that we have to overcome. People are wary of attempts to amend or revise the constitution. Thus, it is safe to assume that even if we are able to get the senate to agree to push for the adoption of a federal form of government, it will take a lot of time before that can realistically be achieved.

Benefits of federalization

Before we leave the matter of federalism, I would like to state that the adoption of the federal form of government would enable the Bangsa Moro a fuller opportunity to promote their own identify and culture and their own economic development at their own pace without the need of seceding or declaring their independence from the republic.

Hopefully, the federalization of the republic will lead to a just and lasting peace in the provinces and cities of central and southern Mindanao which will compose the federal state of the Bangsa Moro.

The adoption of the federal form of government would, likewise, address the concerns of the rest of the country that their respective development efforts are being thwarted by the bias shown by Manila-based bureaucrats in favor of what is now popularly called 'imperial Manila.' In their own federal states, the state governments, including that of the Bangsa Moro, would have greater leeway to plan, push for, fund and implement projects that will speed up the development of their own regions.

Can Muslims and Christians co-exist?

My answer is why not?

Muslims and Christians do peacefully co-exist in my city, Cagayan de Oro city; in Davao city; in Cotabato city; in Tagbilaran city; in Cebu city; in Manila, in Taguig, in Tuguearao, in hundreds of communities throughout the land.

Living together as neighbors

The fact that in those communities, Muslims and Christians live together as neighbors without killing one another shows that, indeed, no religious divide categorizes our people into irreconcilable, hostile blocs.

It is true that violence has occasionally rocked the serenity of other communities where Muslims and Christians live side by side as in Marawi city, Basilan and Sulu where Muslims predominate. But it is also true that one has yet to hear of the Muslim majority oppressing the Christian minority in Tawi-Tawi. Unless that is the best kept secret in this country.

One father: Abraham

Moreover, I am most optimistic that sooner than later, the Christians and the Muslims of this country will realize that we belong to one country and are descended from one and the same father: Abraham. And that our two religions instead of separating us should bind us to the same Supreme Being and lead us to respect one another.

After all, Muslims do proclaim that Islam is a religion of peace and all Christians believe that Christianity is a religion of love. If that be so and I have no reason to doubt that it is so, it is only a question of time before we will be embracing one another as children of the same God and as brothers and sisters of the same race and the same nation.

I pray with all my heart that we will get to that situation before more lives are lost and things get worse.



The Mindanao Security Situation: A “Whole-Society” Approach towards Peace

By Lt. Gen. Benjamin Dolorfino

It my distinct pride and honor to be invited as a resource speaker in this round table discussion about the Mindanao Situation. I spent most of my 39 years in the military service in Mindanao, hence, my heart will always be for the common good of the people in Mindanao.

I will talk about the security situation so that you will understand better the problems affecting the promotion of peace, development and security in the area. When I say security, I do not mean the traditional sense of being free from physical or mental harm. I am referring to the broader and multi-dimensional concept of national security similar to the definition given by the National Defense College of the Philippines. It actually defines human security. It is a state or condition wherein the people and their institutions are free from violence; they are free to engage in productive enterprises; their human rights and civil liberties are respected at all times; and their welfare,

well-being, way of life and environment are always protected and enhanced. The presentation covers the following topics:

1. Prevailing Security Situation
2. Understanding Conflict and the Utility of Force
3. Nature of Our Internal Security Problems
4. Understanding the Concept of Center of Gravity
5. Society as a Trinity
6. Winning Small Battles and Winning Peace with the People
7. United Front for Peace, Development and Security
8. Wish List of Security Sector Reforms

Soldiers are plain warriors by tradition but faced with the complexities of our internal security problems, they must realize that conflicts are not fought and won with arms alone. There are other means of fighting the enemy without using arms. For decades now, we have been fighting the enemies of the state with the full might of the armed forces led by officers who are well-trained both in local and foreign schools. They have employed the best military tactics, techniques and procedures that can be learned from these schools. We are far superior in manpower, equipment, armaments and weaponry compared to insurgent, terrorist and criminal groups. But, are they winning?

At the resurgence of insurgency in the late nineteen-sixties, there were only two groups, the CPP-NPA and the MNLF. These groups mutated through the years of fighting that we are confronted now with more virulent enemy groups, the Communist Terrorist Movement (CTM), rouge MNLF groups, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), lawless MILF groups (LMG) and Abu Sayaff Group (ASG). Also, the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a regional terrorist group, and other foreign terrorist organizations have joined the fray. The resultant insecurity in the affected areas complicated the situation and gave rise to the existence of organized criminal groups and community armed groups. Is there something wrong with the way we are confronting our internal security problems? If yes,

how should we go about with our internal security operations? Are the armed forces fighting a war or pacifying our wayward countrymen to achieve peace?

Understanding Conflict

First and foremost in this introspection process is for you to have a clear understanding of conflict and the utility of force. Not all conflict situations are the same. Conflicts are ranged into a spectrum of three levels, namely: high intensity, mid-intensity and low-intensity. The utility of force varies in resolving these conflict situations.

High-intensity conflict is characterized with the utmost use of military force utilizing massive manpower and industrial resources of nations. It is war among nations. World War I and II fall under this category. This type of conflict gave rise to the so-called “Western Way of War”, the overwhelming use of force to destroy the enemy’s will to fight.

Mid-intensity conflict is also war among nations but at a lower level of violence. Aside from military force, other instruments of national power also come to play such as diplomacy, economic embargo and information warfare to weaken the will of adversary nations. This is a regional war situation like the Gulf War where the US led coalition of nations fought Iraq.

At the bottom level is the low-intensity conflict situation like our internal security problems. It is war amongst people. According to Sir Rupert Smith in his book “The Utility of Force”, the battlefields rest in the hearts and minds of people in a low-intensity conflict situation. Aside from the use of military force to buy peace and stabilize the situation, other instruments of national power play prominent roles in resolving the conflict.

Low-intensity conflict is an enigmatic situation. Many nations have used overwhelming force and failed in the process. History is replete with examples

of failures in the use of force to fight irregular warfare in low-intensity conflict situations. The US armed forces intervened in the internal conflict among the Vietnamese people using all the modern weaponry they can muster, but miserably failed. North Vietnam fought asymmetrically thru information warfare that destroyed the will of the American people by systematically portraying the costliness, unjustness and inhumanity of the war through the international mass media. In the end, the American people demanded the pull-out of US troops. Likewise, the former Soviet Union failed in its intervention in Afghanistan despite use of state of the art weaponry. We have been confronting our internal security problems for decades now without success. From mere insurgencies, the situation has worsened to include terrorism and organized criminality. Why is this so? An in-depth analysis of our internal security problems would provide us reasons.

Whole Society Approach

The armed forces, being the primary agency in the security sector, are often seen as the entities that can address and promote peace, stability and security. But internal security problems are not only a military concern as these disturbances to peace and order are merely symptoms or physical manifestations of deeper societal problems that caused these events.

Our internal security problems are likened to a tree. The branches and leaves represent the different threat groups and their members, respectively. The roots represent the multi-dimensional root causes of these problems. The use of military force can only go as far as cutting the branches and removing the leaves. Unless you go down the trunk and eliminate the roots, new branches and leaves will grow with time. This was clearly illustrated during the Ramos administration when the armed forces achieved strategic victory over the CTM in 1994. Over time the CTM regained strength because the concerned instrumentalities of the civilian government failed to address effectively the root causes. Lasting solution to our internal security problems would entail

sustained non-military interventions that are multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders in nature.

The “whole government approach” called for by the National Internal Security Plan (NISP) is deemed insufficient. It would require a “whole society approach” involving the three basic stakeholders of the society – the government, armed forces and people. There is no better wisdom than the words of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari during the 10th Anniversary celebration of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement in Davao City on September 2, 2007 that, “Peace can never be imposed on the people for it would take the people themselves to create peace.”

The “whole government approach” called for by the National Internal Security Plan (NISP) is deemed insufficient. It would require a “whole society approach” involving the three basic stakeholders of the society – the government, armed forces and people. There is no better wisdom than the words of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari during the 10th Anniversary celebration of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement in Davao City on September 2, 2007 that, “Peace can never be imposed on the people for it would take the people themselves to create peace.”

“Peace can never be imposed”

There is no better wisdom than the words of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari during the 10th Anniversary celebration of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement in Davao City on September 2, 2007 that, “Peace can never be imposed on the people for it would take the people themselves to create peace.”

Any solution that is imposed would surely elicit resistance from the adversely affected sector of the society. When there is resistance, conflict situation follows. Have we not been imposing peace on our people using military force? Is this the reason why we cannot achieve lasting peace in our country? In the

conduct of internal security operations, do the armed forces appear as if they are waging war against the people regardless of whether they are enemies of the state or innocent civilians? And worse, are they using overwhelming military force such that innocent civilians are harmed as well? In the conduct of their combat operations, have they been committing human rights violations, causing collateral damages and displacing civilians? If yes, then the armed forces have become part of the problems rather than the solution. What is the utility of force in low-intensity conflict situation?

Tasked to conduct internal security operations in a given area of operations, the armed forces are like visitors of a house pestered by pests. While they can eliminate the pests using force, they cannot solve the problems that breed the existence of these pests by ourselves alone. The cultural barrier will always pose as obstacle in giving unilateral solutions to local problems because we have a multi-ethnic society. It would take the residents of the house to do a lasting house cleaning job. Who are the residents of this proverbial house? They are the local government units (LGUs) and the civil society. Clearly, fighting insurgents is different from fighting insurgency. Insurgency is a societal condition that breeds the existence of insurgents. While we can use military force in fighting insurgents, we cannot use it in fighting insurgency. The armed forces cannot use bullets and bombs to resolve social inequities, poverty or cultural disharmony. It would entail sustained non-military interventions that are multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders in nature to resolve insurgency. In the Philippine setting, there are six dimensions that significantly affect the lives of people, namely: military, political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental and informational. Each of these dimensions is not isolated but rather interconnected with each other. There are problems in each dimension that collectively contribute to our internal security problems. Their dynamics result in what we have in the society, the existence of insurgency, terrorism, criminality, clan wars and ethnic violence. These are systemic problems that need sustained multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders interventions.

There are problems in each dimension that collectively contribute to our internal security problems. Their dynamics result in what we have in the society, the existence of insurgency, terrorism, criminality, clan wars and ethnic violence. These are systemic problems that need sustained multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders interventions.

The armed forces can become part of the problem if military units misapply military force. In a low-intensity conflict situation, military force should be applied with utmost circumspection. Definitely, the use of overwhelming force is not applicable in this type of conflict. It will result to displacement of civilians, collateral damages and human rights violations. These adverse effects of military force to non-combatants alienate the people and exacerbate existing conflict situations. In the eyes of the affected civilians, soldiers are villains rather than their protectors.

Central to any conflict situation is politics. Carl Von Clausewitz, a renowned Prussian military theorist, claims in his treatise "On War" that, "War is an extension of political intercourse by other means". When political differences are not settled peacefully, nations or groups go to war. In our country, armed conflicts are caused by violent political struggle that are ideological, secessionist and religious militancy in nature. They are fueled by subsidiary problems like political inequities, poor governance, injustices, corruption, neglect, oppression and absence of rule of law.

Our internal conflicts have a socio-economic face. Poverty results in subsidiary problems like illiteracy, social inequities, unemployment, and poor hygiene and sanitation that in turn drive people to insurgency, terrorism and criminality. Hardship in life may drive a devout Muslim to militancy when agitated by terrorist groups and promise of a better life in paradise if he becomes a "shahid" or martyr. In a similar manner, Communism becomes a promised alternative for social justice and a better life.

We have a multi-ethnic society, hence, cultural problems play a big role in the existence of conflict situations. We lack cultural cohesiveness and harmony. Even within an ethnic group like the Maranaos and Tausogs, clan war or “rido” is the primary cause of disturbances to peace and order. Ethnocentrism leads to discrimination, biases, animosities and ethnic violence

The environment also plays a part in the dynamics of our internal security problems. Problems created by dwindling natural resources and improper waste management led to disturbances to peace and order. In the provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi where illegal forms of fishing are rampant, maritime resources in the municipal waters are rapidly getting depleted. The local fishermen are now venturing to the high seas where they experience hostile encounters with the “Superlights”, the big fishing fleets from other places. This adds fuel to the existing conflict situations in the area. Poor hygiene and sanitation in depressed areas cause the spread of diseases. Since the people live in poverty, they are driven to criminality if only to gain quick money to save the life of a sick family member.

In the informational dimension, ignorance, misinformation and disinformation also lead to conflict situations. A good case in point was the abortive signing of the MOA-AD in August 2008. Lack of information about the document and the GRP-MILF peace process created “monsters” out of the stakeholders. Some MILF Commanders attacked and pillaged Christian communities thinking that it was the end of the peace process. The armed forces responded in kind to MILF attacks that in turn caused collateral damages and massive displacement of civilians. Politicians also joined the fray that only added fuel to the existing animosities. Prompt and truthful public information mean a lot in mitigating conflict situations. A well-informed citizenry makes a peaceful society.

Center of Gravity

In war, one does not need to hit the entire being of the enemy to defeat him. It would be a useless exercise of energy and resources to do so. There lies a key

quality in the enemy that serves as the hub of all his power and strength. We call this as the center of gravity in military parlance. Hitting the enemy's center of gravity results in debilitating consequences that will make him fall like a deck of domino.

The biblical duel between David and Goliath illustrates this military phenomenon. David, who was vastly inferior in strength compared to Goliath, hit the latter with a slingshot on the forehead through an opening in his armor. The exposed forehead, a vital kill point, was Goliath's center of gravity. In the Vietnam War, this was also demonstrated by the way North Vietnam defeated the US. They wittingly identified the center of gravity as the "will of the US government and the American people". They hit and destroyed two sides of the "trinity of war" (government and people). By portraying the Vietnam War as a costly, inhuman and unjust war through the international mass media, domestic opinion went against the war efforts. It led to the pull-out of US troops. Both were ingenious cases of asymmetric warfare by hitting the enemy's center of gravity.

In our setting, what is the center of gravity of the insurgent, terrorist and criminal groups? At the operational level, these are the societal conditions that make them relevant, the "roots" of the proverbial problem tree. Eliminating the "roots" would make them irrelevant. What is the center of gravity at the tactical level? These are the elements that provide strength to the branches which enable them to support the weight of the leaves. They are the key leaders who provide the moral strength, ideological motivation and operational direction to the members. Deliberate focus to eliminate the key leaders, through tactical or legal means, will lead to the collapse of the different threat groups. It must be noted that the cadre of leaders are bred in our best universities and madrasah schools.

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Clausewitz describes what he calls a “fascinating trinity”. He sees society as a trinity composed of the government, armed forces and people. The people form the base of the trinity being the focal point in a democratic system. The government and armed forces exist to serve and protect the welfare and well-being of the people. Both in times of peace and war, this trinity of stakeholders must interact and support each other. A strong foundation of this trinity is an indicator of a strong society, with peace and order reigning as long as these stakeholders mutually support each other.

Through this concept of a trinitarian society, interventions through sustained multi-stakeholders dialogue, partnership and collaboration can be undertaken to fill the gaps toward peace, development and security. It is along this line that in addition to its primordial military task of fighting the enemies of the state, the armed forces must expand its role in Civil-Military Operations (CMO) by taking the lead in building and transforming relationships with the local government units and the people to address the root causes of our internal security problems.

Through CMO, soldiers may serve as catalysts and bridges for multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders processes to resolve societal inequities and divides through sustained dialogue, partnership and collaboration. With this, social innovations and new arrangements that offer shared solutions to the divides help bring about a new, co-created social reality that result to peace, development and security. This united front building activity strengthens the

trinity that in turn builds a stronger society and alienates the enemies of the state from the civil society.

Resolving a low-intensity conflict situation is not all about warfighting, but primarily winning peace with our people through non-military multi-stakeholders processes that address the root causes of the problems. The role of the armed forces requires the highest form of soldiery. It brings to mind the old adage of Sun Tzu that, “The acme of skill in warfare is subduing the enemy without fighting”. Rather than warfighting, soldiers shall be involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

The only way to give a lasting resolution to our internal security problems is to co-create a new social reality that significantly improves the living conditions of our countrymen in all aspects of life. We must aim for a condition wherein the people and their institutions are free from violence; they are free to engage in productive enterprises; their human rights and civil liberties are respected at all times; and their welfare, well-being, way of life and environment are always protected and enhanced. This situation approximates national security as espoused by the National Defense College of the Philippines. This is our framework of security.

In line with this new concept of internal security operations, the armed forces must pursue six lines of operations that correspond to the six societal dimensions affecting the lives of our people, namely: (a) military operations to achieve peace and order; (b) CMO to facilitate good governance; (c) CMO to promote socio-economic development; (d) CMO to promote cultural cohesion and harmony; (e) CMO to achieve good environmental management; and (f) CMO to promote prompt and truthful public information. It should be noted that out of these six lines of operation, only one line uses military force. If ever there is a need to use military force, it should be conducted with an intelligence-driven surgical combat operation to avoid harm and collateral damages to civilians. Gone are the days of large and prolonged military operations that only do more harm to civilians than the enemies of the state.

The campaign design retains the triad of intelligence, combat operations, and CMO. While intelligence operation is constant throughout the campaign, combat operations and CMO follow an inversely proportional role as the campaign progresses. Combat operations tapers down while CMO widens toward the tail end of the campaign. The triad shall be complemented by aggressive information operation, legal operation, Peace Building Teams (PBTs) operations and integrated territorial defense system.

The Ultimate Warrior

Under this concept, a soldier is not only warrior, but also a bridging leader, facilitator of good governance, catalyst of socio-economic development, conflict manager, environmentalist and public information specialist. Rather than a villain, he is a savior in the hearts and minds of the people. In the eyes of Sun Tzu, he is the ultimate warrior.

Our internal security problems cannot be resolved by arms alone. Referring back to the analogy of the proverbial house, soldiers may eliminate the “pests” in the house, but not a lasting “house cleaning” job. It would take the residents of the house themselves to eliminate the societal conditions that breed the existence of “pests”. Fighting insurgents is largely different from fighting insurgency. It would take the partnership and collaboration of the stakeholders, a united front of the armed forces, LGUs and civil society to resolve the root causes of our internal security problems. This is the area where CMO should be deepened and widened. Deeper than the usual CMO, it would entail the establishment of sustained working relationships with the LGUs and civil society to co-create new and innovative arrangements that would significantly improve the lives of the people and make insurgency, terrorism and criminality irrelevant. The scope is widened in the sense that soldiers will go beyond their military box to work with stakeholders in other dimensions. Areas that should be covered are public affairs, civil affairs, environmental management and public information.

This new concept of CMO is an exercise of bridging leadership. Simply, it is convening the stakeholders to co-create solution to tough and complex problems. Military officers and non-commissioned officers when trained in bridging leadership, communication skills and social marketing can become effective bridges and catalysts for multi-stakeholders processes. They possess inherent leadership capital that gives the credibility to convene and link stakeholders.

We have tough and complex internal security problems fueled by centuries old of strife over varied issues and concerns among our people. Status quo will not yield any solution. Only a co-created new social reality, concrete solutions that resolve the inequities and divides, can untangle our problems. In a democratic society, solutions can never be imposed. Only sustained multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders processes that result to shared solutions offer the best option. The efforts should be spearheaded and orchestrated by the LGUs.

How can we establish the united front? The soldiers are aware of the problems and they know what should be done. Through CMO, they can provide the bridge and be the catalysts for multi-stakeholder engagements with the LGUs and civil society. Training has to be conducted on bridging leadership, communication skills and social marketing. Eventually, the community of bridging leaders has to be enlarged to include other key leaders in the locality. The preparation phase ends with the organization of a convenor group and the establishment of mechanisms for sustained dialogue, partnership and collaboration.

The dream of peace, development and security in our country will not be realized unless “top to bottom” reforms are institutionalized. As presented, the government, armed forces and civil society need to march in step in pursuit of this dream. The advocacy is national in scope.

First and foremost, there must be a clear-cut national direction that should be embraced and pursued by all citizens and institutions. We must be guided

by a National Security Strategy (NSS). It should be a public document. The NSS pursues our vital national security interests encompassing all-important aspects of the people's life like security, political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental, informational, techno-scientific and foreign affairs. It must be noted that six of these dimensions are covered at the local level by the ACC and UFPDS. Strategy is composed of three indispensable components, ends, ways and means. The vital national security interests are objectives (ENDS) that must be pursued by every concerned sector. Our vital national security interests may include peace and order; political stability; good governance and public administration; infrastructure adequacy; socio-economic equity; quality education and literacy; robust economy; cultural cohesiveness and harmony; sustainable environment; public informational awareness; techno-scientific prominence; and international amity. Strategic concepts, policies and principles (WAYS) must be formulated to clearly lay the paths to be followed in pursuit of the national security interests. Institutions, capabilities and resources (MEANS) necessary to pursue the national security interests must be identified and pooled together.

The "whole society" concept will be facilitated if a sequel is provided to Executive Order No. 773 (Enhancing the POC) that created the Regional Internal Security Coordinating Center (RISCC). The mechanism needs to be replicated down to the provincial, city and municipal levels, and the scope should be expanded to encompass six dimensions (security, political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental and informational). Subsequently, a Joint Implementing Rules and Regulations (JIRR) must be formulated to give official guidance to the Local Chief Executives and all concerned local government units and offices.

There is nothing new in the conceptualization of the "whole society" approach. All the ideas, concepts and principles used were learned from schools and field experiences commonly shared by members of the armed forces. While many reforms are needed in the armed forces, it is knowledge that will catalyze the reforms. Therefore, reforms will emanate from education and training to

refocus and emphasize certain basic knowledge, important military aspects and lessons learned. Starting with the basic career courses, military personnel must be deeply indoctrinated on responsible citizenship, human rights, international humanitarian law, historical background of internal security problems, culture sensitivity, conflict resolution, multidimensional concept of national security, art of war, levels of command, spectrum of conflict and utility of force. Advance career courses should give emphasis on tactical art throughout the course. Likewise, the Command and Staff Course should give focus on operational art or the art of campaigning. Master in National Security Administration must be made a mandatory career course to broaden the horizon of senior military leaders on the multi-dimensional nature of national security. Short civilian courses on bridging leadership, effective communication, social marketing and media handling will help tremendously in the advocacy of united front building. At the individual level regardless of our position in life, we must practice good and responsible citizenship. This is the most important value that should be deeply ingrained at home, in school and in every institution. Beyond ourselves and our family, we have civic duties and responsibilities for the common good. We must link with the rest in the society in pursuit of peace, development and security in our country. With fortitude and perseverance on our part, the bad elements of the society will be lost eventually in the sea of good men and women.

All told, this is not the fight of your soldiers alone, but all of us Filipinos. We are all stakeholders of peace, development and security, hence, each and every one of us must be a part of the solution.



Established in 2002, PCID is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to the study of Islamic and democratic political thought and the search for peace, democracy and development in Muslim communities.

PCID was the result of discussions on Islam and democracy among young Muslim intellectuals that included Ms. Amina Rasul, a former Cabinet member under the Pres. Fidel Ramos, Atty. Nasser Marohomsalic, former Human Rights Commissioner, and, the late Abraham Iribani, a former spokesperson of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Their concern on the future of democracy in Muslim Mindanao stemmed from the growing popularity of the discourse that somehow Islam and democracy are not compatible.

PCID, which made the transition from Council to Center in June 2010, was therefore an attempt to counter that narrative; to give emphasis to the idea that any attempt to address the problems of Muslim Mindanao should include and should occur within the context of democracy.

Today, PCID is seen as an objective, neutral party with a track record of bringing together all sectors in the democratic dialogue for peace and development. The convenors of the PCID include politicians, civil society leaders, government, educators, ulama, feminists, media, military, Balik-Islam, business leaders coming from all the Muslim dominant provinces of Mindanao as well as from the Muslim diaspora of Luzon.

www.pcid.org.ph



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The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung is an independent, non-profit German political foundation guided by the principles of the Christian Democratic Movement. The main activities of the foundation's work are: training political and social leaders; encouraging political and social elites to focus on development in their actions; introducing democratic institutions and processes; promoting international political dialogue; and the worldwide exchange of information and experience.

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