

# Give peace a chance

The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks

Abraham 'Abet' Iribani, MNSA







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**Abraham Iribani**

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*'The painting depicts a twofold history of the Sulu region. The leftmost composition is an image of a Tausug warrior fused to the handle of a traditional Moro kris. This is symbolical of a life that has embraced the struggle for self-determination. The composition pays tribute to centuries of struggle of the Moro people, depicting the late 60s well into the 70s: the burning of Jolo, Sulu as fiery backdrop to a lone silhouetted rooster—the sarimanok—head bowed in reverence and in mourning.*

*The right portion is a composition of hope, symbolized by the convergence of the Islamic crescent, the star, Bertrand Russell's symbol and the dove as universal symbol of peace. The lower portion is a mother and child, which again portends renewed hope amidst a backdrop of relative tranquility. It is a message of continuity, the passing of yet one more generation, and the continuance of a legacy.'*

—Abdulmari Asia Imao



*for Langka and Jihan...*





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## Foreword

### ABET IRIBANI: MORO AND FILIPINO

*By Soliman M. Santos, Jr.*

I first met Abraham “Abet” Iribani around August 1993 through the referral of a colleague in the Office of Senator Orlando S. Mercado where I was newly employed as head of his legislative staff. Sen. Mercado was then an adviser to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) for peace talks with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and I was assigned to backstop him on this. My own desire to educate myself about the MNLF led me to Abet, then its most visible representative in Manila as MNLF Special Peace Emissary, Peace Talks Secretariat Chairman, and Spokesman. From then on until about 2001, Abet had been my main “line” to or key informant about the MNLF, especially as an independent peace advocate after leaving the Office of Sen. Mercado in March 1995.

Abet was a great key informant for my work as a peace advocate, researcher and writer. One of the reference materials he handed me early on during my many visits to his modest apartment in Bacood, Sta. Mesa, Manila over the years was the late Chief of the Information Department of the MNLF Abdurasad Asani’s classic pamphlet *Moros Not Filipinos*. I then took a double-take at those words on the pamphlet cover whose only graphic was the red MNLF flag. As a mainstream Filipino, even though University of the Philippines (U.P.)-educated and of national-democratic activist background (though already a popular-democrat at that time), my Filipino nationalist mindset was not quite ready for that proposition. Through many discussions with a very intelligent Abet and much reading up, I eventually understood it, even internalized it.

The Moros are a nation in themselves (whether distinct from or part of a larger Filipino nation) in the sense of having a common Indo-Malayan racial origin and religion of Islam which arrived in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, experience of self-government and indigenous political institutions in the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao starting in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, a shared history of anti-colonialism (including anti-Filipino colonialism) since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, independence intact up to a certain point during the American colonial period of the early 1900s, and a more or less defined historical territory or homeland in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan (Minsupala). They relate more to Muslim Malay civilization than to the Christian-Western civilization of mainstream Philippines. There is a historico-cultural basis for Moro separatism, and it has to do with the most basic aspirations for a people’s identity, way of life and longing for self-rule.

The tension between these Moro aspirations and mainstream Philippine, even Filipino nationalist, paramount considerations of preserving national sovereignty and territorial integrity is what the so-called “Moro problem” (Moros would say

“Filipino problem”) has been all about. It was what the GRP-MNLF peace process of three separate rounds under three successive Philippine Presidents since 1975 was all about, a major effort to resolve that tension politically and peacefully, after both sides had engaged each other militarily in what has been the fiercest and bloodiest fighting on Philippine soil since the Second World War. The “mother of all battles” was that of Jolo, Sulu in February 1974. When Abet’s poor hardworking parents died as a result of this battle, the then 17-year-old Abet (born on 26 February 1957 in Tapul, Sulu, his mother coming from the Sharif clan of mostly public school teachers), was re-born as a Moro activist. Some of us U.P. student activists at that time knew next to nothing about Jolo and our Moro activist contemporaries but I am glad to say that we did express solidarity and showed it by collecting and sending relief goods. But basically we went our own separate activist ways over the years, with Abet doing his student activism in the predominantly Christian campus of Ateneo de Zamboanga, eventually joining the MNLF semi-underground in Zamboanga City in 1983.

Those separate activist paths would cross only nearly 20 years after the “Battle for Jolo.” Filipino peace activists (a.k.a advocates) and MNLF activists like Abet involved in the GRP-MNLF peace negotiations of 1992-96 would converge around this process. Abet was practically thrust into the job as MNLF spokesman when the original spokesman at that time suddenly passed on the task to him. By that time, Abet had the requisite articulateness and bearing. In due time, he was the most accessible MNLF representative. During the critical later years of 1995-96, civil society peace advocates began to more proactively observe and intervene in the process, even during formal peace talks held in Jakarta. They, therefore, could not miss Abet.

For my part, I saw, mainly through Abet, how the MNLF had reconciled itself to the *realpolitik* of getting an autonomy much less than they bargained for in implementing the 1976 Tripoli Agreement which provided for a Provisional Government. Because they were willing to give peace a chance, nay, “a maximum chance.” More precisely, they were willing to give a chance to the proposition that Moros can also be Filipinos, that Moros can integrate into the Philippine mainstream which would accept them as fellow first-class citizens, that the Moro nation can coexist with(in) the Filipino nation with mutual benefit to both. Abet and most MNLF leaders were convinced, at that historical juncture, that there was a chance and it was a chance worth taking. Thus, they took it and worked hard to get the best they could.

Abet was the main workhorse for the MNLF during the peace negotiations. This is where he mainly devoted his life to the MNLF. His apartment was a veritable hub and communication center for the MNLF, with MNLF functionaries coming, staying and going, often for logistical arrangements administered by Abet. His loving wife Lanka had to serve never-ending great-tasting Sulu coffee along with modest snacks or meals, as the case may be. Money in the millions for the peace talks

passed through Abet's hands. But one never saw this translated into a house of his own, a comfortable enough lifestyle, new furniture and household appliances. Instead, Abet and Lanka's sala had to accommodate papers and papers and papers of the peace talks. Abet was an archivist as head of the MNLF peace secretariat who compiled all the relevant documents and correspondence, who kept personal diaries of all relevant discussions and transactions, including the crucial ones behind the scenes.

This is why his book, with his inside story and recommendations, on the negotiations is such a valuable resource, especially to historians, peace researchers *and* to the key players themselves in the GRP-MNLF peace process as they review the agreement and its implementation of ten years. Perhaps even more important than certain recommendations he has made for the effective implementation of the peace agreement, are those he made related to negotiations with the other major Moro rebel faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), under a new format though still consistent with the peace agreement. It was to Abet's credit as a young, middle-level MNLF leader that he did not let factionalism or sectarianism get in the way of a better arrangement for the Moros.

Abet astutely proposed, among others, the setting up of two autonomous regions instead of one autonomous region like the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). These are the Central Mindanao Autonomous Region (CMAR) and the Western Mindanao Autonomous Region (WMAR). At first glance, one might dismiss this as another form of divide-and-rule similar to Regions IX and XII under Marcos Presidential Decree No. 1618 in 1979. But this configuration is consistent with the Moros' historical experience of separate sultanates, mainly of Sulu and Maguindanao. The MILF "will certainly fit" in the CMAR, while the MNLF "will certainly find their place" in the WMAR. Of course, the final decision would still be made by the people in a plebiscite, and the leaders will have to submit themselves to the electorate in their respective areas. The set up encourages "constructive competition" among the major Moro tribes instead of the destructive rivalry for Muslim leaderships in one ARMM. The CMAR and WMAR would also apply under federalism. Think about it well.

That recommendation was part of Abet's thesis for a Masters in National Security Administration (MNSA) at the National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP) in 2000.

Here the training is for a national security perspective, and theses are invariably studies of the national security implications of whatever relevant subject matter. Abet had to learn this, and then apply it to the GRP-MNLF peace negotiations and agreement. This he was able to do with flying colors *without however losing the Moro perspective*. He found a way to combine or reconcile those two perspectives, to be both Moro and Filipino.

This Abet would do not only in theory but also in practice, in his work life. Most notably as an Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local

Government (DILG) from 2001-04. Irony of ironies, his most critical assignment then was the processing of clearances for visitors of his former “boss,” detained MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari. During his watch, nothing untoward happened that could have jeopardized the safety of Misuari or compromised national security. As a public official, three years at DILG and, before that, one year as Executive Director of the President’s Education for Peace Program (PEPP) in 1997 and 20 years in various capacities in the Philippine *Amanah* Bank from 1978-98, he was never involved or implicated in any corruption charge or other scandal. One might add so with his service in the MNLF. He was Mr. Clean – the kind one needs in Philippine (and Moro) politics and governance.

Abet was also a modernist and reformist Muslim, one who believed Islam to be compatible with democracy and who accentuated such Islamic values as tolerance, balance and moderation. One of the books he lent me from his considerable shelf of books at home was Fatima Mernissi’s *Islam and Democracy* which is a Muslim woman scholar’s critique of conservative Muslim “fear of the modern world.” In recent years, he and other moderate Muslims like Amina Rasul and Nasser Marohomsalic formed the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) in 2002, which can play a role in enriching Philippine democracy.

But Abet was not successful or lucky in the Philippine democratic exercise of elections: as a Senatorial candidate who was the “Anak ng Mindanao” in the REPORMA Party slate in the 1998 elections and as a Congressional candidate for the 2<sup>nd</sup> District in Sulu in the 2004 elections. The former failure was due to national electoral bias against Muslim candidates, the latter failure was due to the onset of Abet’s kidney failure in the middle of the campaign in April 2004. Abet’s heavy work load and hectic work style over the years, including especially the tiring and thankless job as head of the MNLF peace secretariat, must have finally taken its toll. Saddled with irregular dialysis because of insufficient money for it, still Abet worked with the energy he had left on turning his thesis into a book, until he was overtaken by death on 27 May 2006 at the Kidney Institute.

It is no secret in MNLF circles that Abet fell out of their favor just after the conclusion of the 1996 peace agreement. He, among other talented young and dynamic Moros, was conspicuously untapped by the MNLF leadership at the helm of the post-agreement ARMM and Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). It seems that, for some, this rising MNLF star had to be shot down. Only one leader could be preeminent, even if this meant being his own spokesman. The unwritten rule was that no one should emerge who could possibly rival or replace that leadership. This inability to develop a second line of leaders, younger blood who can take over and carry on in the future, and worse the discarding of those whom the leaders no longer find any use for, have been among the undoings of the MNLF as it has unraveled almost right after winning a peace agreement.

The truth is that there are many bright young Moros, including of Abet’s generation, who could provide the future of a moral and competent leadership that



the Moro people and the Moro liberation fronts need. The time of having just one preeminent leader may be over. The need for many good and dynamic leaders to step up at various levels and spheres is actually not only a Moro problem but a Filipino problem. Unfortunately, Abet was one Moro-Filipino candle whose struggling but full and lively flame just burned out.

Perhaps, some MNLF leaders have belatedly realized this and the value of Abet. Lanka and their only child/daughter Jihan tell the story about several senior MNLF leaders who condoled with them for Abet's burial, as he had wished, beside his parents in the Muslim cemetery in Zamboanga City. When Abet was still alive, he had asked one of these leaders, the MNLF's spiritual leader Ustadz Abdalbaki Abubakar, "What have I done (to deserve this treatment)?" Ustadz Baki had replied, "Do not regret good deeds done. Allah will take care." To lighten the sad occasion this time, he and company bantered with Lanka and Jihan about Abet still doing his peace secretariat job as usual, as advanced party preparing the way for the senior MNLF leaders like them who would soon follow to their next peace destination – this time, heaven.





**Fidel Valdez Ramos**  
Former President  
Republic of the Philippines  
1992-1998

### Message

The commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement this year is a landmark event, among the highlights of which is the publication of this book, *"Give Peace A Chance: The Story of The GRP-MNLF Peace Talks."* Written by the MNLF's own Special Peace Emissary and Chairman of its Secretariat for the Peace Talks, Abraham "Abet" Iribani's book gives an MNLF insight of that historic conflict settlement. It also shows that the author was truly a competent participant-observer who took meticulous notes and documentation of the various processes, from substantive negotiations to administration.

In my own book on the four-year negotiations, *"Break Not The Peace,"* I specifically mentioned in page 64 Abet Iribani's role in the clarification of the suspected participation of MNLF commanders and regulars in the Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur raid on 4 April 1995. An MNLF investigation report hand-carried by Abet to GRP Chairman Ambassador Manuel T. Yan clarified that the suspected raiders *-were not* MNLF but Abu Sayyaf members. This was indeed a clear instance of the Moro rebel group's cooperation with the government in the fight against terrorism, which augured well for our peace and development efforts. The emergence of extremist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf, in turn, underscored the urgency of our peace process with the MNLF.

Abel's book, naturally, has more micro-details than mine. Thus, it contributes much to Philippine Moro history-writing and to the growing literature on conflict-resolution and peace-building. In the true spirit of peace, unification and reconciliation, Abet has been able to combine a lifelong Moro outlook with a more contemporary national security perspective in reviewing and understanding the 1992-1996 GRP-MNLF peace negotiations, the 1996 Peace Agreement, and what still remains to be done. Abet is evidently forward-looking — and so must peace be if it is to have a chance.

I congratulate the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) for its five years of service to the Muslim *ummah* and for publishing *"Give Peace A Chance."* PCID indeed provides a valuable platform for Muslim democrats and progressive voices to be heard on issues affecting our Muslim communities.

*Mabuhay* and best wishes for a better Philippines!!!



**Eduardo R. Ermita**  
Executive Secretary  
Office of the President of the Philippines  
Malacañang

### Message

Since the signing of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines-Moro National Liberation Front Final Peace Agreement in September 1996, a great deal of documentation has come out on the GRP-MNLF peace process. A formidable account which easily comes to mind is that by former President Fidel V. Ramos, under whose term said peace agreement was signed, in his book *Break Not the Peace*. Another would be by Professor Rudy Rodil, Mindanao historian, peace negotiator and peace advocate, in his *Kalinaw Mindanaw* published in 2000.

Abet Iribani's work joins this impressive range, coming at a propitious time in 2006 around the 10th anniversary of the 1996 GRP-MNLF final peace agreement. It is made all the more worth reading because it gives the student of peace processes and of political history a look into the mind of the negotiator at the "other side of the table." Unlike its predecessors, this work dwells heavily on an MNLF perspective, stressing the fact that ownership of the peace process is as much as the MNLF's as it is government's. And unlike the many who dared see the process through the same scope, this work was written with competence and authority by one who was in the midst of it.

Abet was on "the other side of the table." He was then the special peace emissary of the MNLF and chairman of its peace talks secretariat, among others. He carried with him a work ethic that somehow assured us in the Government panel that we had every reason to trust in the sincerity and seriousness of our MNLF counterparts to talk peace. At some point, I began to treat Abet like a son. In time, these talks brought us closer, not so much as GRP or as MNLF representatives, but as fellow Filipinos who dearly longed for lasting peace in our country and for our people.

In the post-settlement period after 1996, Abet lived the spirit of the peace agreement with his own laudable contributions to Philippine governance. His postgraduate studies in national security administration at the National Defense College of the Philippines in 2000 propelled him to the post of assistant secretary in the Department of the Interior and Local Government from 2001 to 2004. That allowed him, in a turn of events, to write the thesis which became the basis for this work.

The objective peacemaker in Abet shows clearly in this work. Unlike documentations coming from "the other side" that are critical, without being constructive, of the GRP-MNLF peace process. Abet offers overlays to further

improve what has been paved. And while he forwards the perspective of that of an MNLF's, he nevertheless infuses a practical and intelligent realization of how programs under the peace agreement may well be carried out within the confines of good and effective governance.

This is Abet's legacy, a work he lived for. It was what kept him the busiest all his productive life, and even in the little time he had left, ill as he was, before the angels carried him back to the Heavens. History will surely have a place for this young man who strived so well to give peace a chance.

It was a privilege to have worked with Abet, and I am happy to have been a part of his meaningful life. May the Lord God bless and keep him, as we will keep him in our hearts always.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abet', with a stylized flourish at the end.



## **Amina Rasul**

**Lead Convenor**

**Philippine Council for Islam and  
Democracy**

### **Message**

On September 2, 2006, the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Final Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was commemorated in Davao City. The agreement had laid to rest almost four decades of conflict by what was then the largest secessionist Muslim group in Mindanao. The architects of the Peace Agreement, former President Fidel V. Ramos and MNLF Chair Nur Misuari were present, joined by government representatives. Chair Misuari was given leave for a day by the Department of Justice to be present.

As government representatives extolled the implementation of the Peace Agreement, Misuari spoke about the “ill-fated peace agreement” and how gargantuan efforts need to be undertaken to resuscitate it. Abraham “Abet” Iribani, had he been alive, would agree.

Laws have been enacted to strengthen the framework for implementing the agreement. However, there has been no visible economic or social progress. The Chairman of the MNLF and former governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao Nur Misuari has been jailed on charges of rebellion for over three years now. Violence and armed conflict continue to erupt, especially in Sulu and Maguindanao.

The question that must be asked then is this: what is the status of the implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement? Is the peace broken? The experience with the GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement will have a significant impact on how the GRP-Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace talks will play out. The Organization of the Islamic Conference has offered to convene the Tripartite Committee to make the assessment. All parties should hear the sentiments of the Muslim communities, the primary stakeholder affected by the Peace Accord. Clearly, the communities themselves and civil society should be involved in the review process. A fair and factual assessment is only possible if all parties concerned are involved in the process.

If Abet Iribani were alive, he would acknowledge that ten years are already lost to us, time that can no longer be recovered. The government, as Abet has discussed during our PCID forums, should be sincere in implementing their end of the agreement. The MNLF can look at what can be salvaged of the Peace Agreement. After all, Chair Misuari believes we ought to “exhume” the agreement and work together to revive it.

The Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, which Abet co-founded, is pleased to present Abet's magnum opus: "Give Peace a Chance: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks." The book provides crucial documentation of the intent behind the agreement as well as an analysis of its substance. Knowing the intent guides the implementors of any agreement thru the minefields of possible conflict of interpretation.

Abet had lived a life of service to his people. His service continues thru this book.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Amira Jansel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping 'A' and a long, trailing 'l'.



**Klaus Preschle**  
Country Representative  
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

### Message

It is with great pleasure and yet also with a deep sense of loss that the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung publishes Abraham Iribani's memoir of the period leading up to the signing of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement (FPA). Mr. Iribani was not just a distinguished Muslim Scholar and widely respected peace advocate, but also a close friend of the Foundation. While no longer with us today, we hope that by publishing his book we preserve his wisdom and spirit for those seeking, as he did, lasting peace for the Philippines.

*Give Peace a Chance: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks* provides a rare glimpse into the MNLF perspective on the FPA negotiations and, the publication of this perspective comes at a crucial time. There is a rising tide of hope for a positive conclusion to the peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF struggle followed hard on the heels of the end of the GRP-MNLF war. Indeed, we hope that the lessons from experience compiled in this book, of successful negotiating techniques, of the positive impact of various stakeholders, of the profits of commitment and sincerity, among other valuable insights, serve as resource and inspiration for those involved in the current process.

Abraham Iribani's thought-provoking book is a call to keep the faith in working for peace, a testament to the good that can be achieved when people, even sworn enemies, come together for sincere dialogue, and his personal legacy to the already rich culture and history of Philippine Muslims.

We would like to thank the Iribani family for the privilege of publishing their late patriarch's work. We also thank Amina Rasul and the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy for their editing work on the manuscript. We believe that the book will make valuable contributions to peace and development in the Philippines, and will also be useful in the formulation of stable and peaceful compromises between religions and cultures in the rest of the world.





## Introduction



*With MNF Commander Kirby Baglier and his men  
at TV-5 Arleut de Guayana - negotiations for J. Neves,  
Lautan, Brazil, April 22, 1993.*

With MNLF Commander Ustadj Bashier and his men with TV-5 Arlene De  
Guzman – negotiation for Fr. Blanco, Lantawan, Basilan, April 22, 1993.

From 1992 to 1996, the last series of negotiations was initiated between the panels of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). These GRP-MNLF Peace Talks represented the long overdue fulfillment of the 1974 Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Resolution in Kuala Lumpur that called for a negotiated political settlement to the Mindanao conflict “within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines.”<sup>1</sup> My purpose in writing this book is to present a first-hand account of the peace talks that took place from September 1992 to September 1996 between the GRP and the MNLF with the active participation of the OIC.

The negotiations that started in 1975 under the auspices of the OIC resulted in the signing of what is now known as the 1976 Tripoli Agreement that called for the establishment of autonomy in thirteen provinces in Southern Philippines. However, further meetings, contacts, and exchange of notes between the Heads of States of Libya and the Philippines concerning the completion of provisions for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement bogged down in 1977, thus bringing the GRP and the MNLF back to the theater of armed conflict in Mindanao.

A decade later, President Corazon C. Aquino’s administration resumed contacts with the MNLF, which led to the signing of another document called the 1987 Jeddah Accord. However, the succeeding 90-day Technical Committee Meetings between the GRP and MNLF Representatives, held in the country without the participation of the OIC, ended in an impasse. The talks collapsed in July 1987, though the two parties nevertheless made commitments to honor the agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities signed in September 1986.

President Fidel V. Ramos initiated the resumption of peace talks with the MNLF early in his administration. The initial contacts developed into what became the 1992-1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. Unlike the failed 1986-1987 Peace Talks, the process was conducted with the active participation of the Secretary General of the OIC and the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six headed by Indonesia. The negotiations succeeded in coming up with a historic document now referred to as “The Peace Agreement” signed in Malacanang

Palace, Manila on September 2, 1996.<sup>2</sup>

This 1996 Accord is considered as the Final Peace Agreement on the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. President Ramos then believed that “with the formal signing of this Final Peace Agreement... we bring to a close almost 30 years of conflict, at the cost of more than 120,000 Filipino lives”<sup>3</sup>. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas echoed the optimism of President Ramos by saying, “an arduous quest for peace that has lasted more than two decades has come to a splendid close”<sup>4</sup>. The OIC Secretary General, Dr. Hamid Algabid, also expressed the same theme when he declared that “today, we seal the final act of the long way we have covered to reach a just, honorable and durable peace in Mindanao.”<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, MNLF Chairman Misuari took the opportunity to make a passionate appeal for support to ensure the success of the Peace Agreement even as he declared that “if we fail...God forbid, we may not have another opportunity to talk peace, for we and our children might be condemned to live in an atmosphere of perpetual war. Let us therefore *give peace a maximum chance*”.<sup>6</sup>

But not many people believed that the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks would succeed. President Ramos admitted later that “in the beginning and up to the final days of the negotiations, the quest seemed like a ‘Mission Impossible’”<sup>7</sup>

Even the MNLF leadership was initially doubtful. “When we embarked on our lonely road to peace”, the MNLF Chairman said, “we had no illusions about the difficulties that lay ahead...owing to our tragic experiences during the previous administrations.”<sup>8</sup> Ramos could not be any different, the MNLF thought, because of his past involvement in the conflict. “As events unfolded, however, skepticism turned to hope, and later hope turned to confidence.”<sup>9</sup>

This portion of the country’s contemporary history is indeed very important. No less than President Ramos came up with a book<sup>10</sup> about it, but “there is still so much that remains to be drawn to get the whole story of the GRP-MNLF peace process.”<sup>11</sup> The various questions now being raised on the Peace Agreement cannot be answered by “just a dry account of positions taken and agreements reached.”<sup>12</sup> The four years of negotiations were filled with occasions of hard bargaining across the negotiating table that on many instances were disturbed by other events far from the negotiating

room. And as the negotiations reached certain critical stages, the involvement of other parties, both local and foreign who have special or personal relations with key members of the negotiating party, effectively influenced the outcome of the negotiations.

This is precisely why this story is written. We need to study the peace documents, review the events surrounding it, draw important lessons, encourage a review of its implementation and the attendant problems encountered, make recommendations, and seek answers to important questions which, if left unanswered, may put serious doubts to the integrity of the Agreement. This historic document “is a crucial step in a what is clearly going to be a very long process of constructing peace in Mindanao.”<sup>13</sup>

In this book, my approach to the subject matter places particular emphasis on two elements: the negotiators involved and the substance of the negotiations. The first element involves three parties: the GRP and the MNLF as the principal conflicting parties and the OIC as the third-party mediator. This book describes how these parties handled the negotiations and what actions they took in order to arrive at certain agreements or consensus. The second element involves the agenda of the negotiations based on the provisions of the Tripoli Agreement.

The materials I used in this study as sources of data came from what can be described as primary sources such as personal diaries, official reports and documents of the Peace Talk (such as Executive summaries and minutes of meetings), still pictures, books, professional journals, magazines, news articles, and other professional writings. However, some of my materials can also be considered to be secondary sources. I collected these materials that directly came out of the negotiations while performing my job as an active and official participant in the peace process.

Though I have made every effort to be as fair, impartial, and objective as humanly possible, this book is nevertheless designed to present a narrative of past events related to the 1992-1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Talks based on my own perspective as an active participant in this process. As such, there were no new interviews conducted with the persons involved to draw additional information on the subject. Statements attributed to some of the participants made after the signing of the Agreement were taken from other

sources, which I have duly acknowledged.

It is because of this that the methodology I adopted is qualitative rather than quantitative. This is only appropriate, especially for the kind of study which is exploratory in nature and which involves forays into motivations and feelings and emphasizing description and explanation. My historical narrations here are based on what Max Weber would call “direct understanding.”

As an MNLF official, I was an eyewitness to certain events and was even involved in making some of these events happen, as I “was constantly in contact with the GRP Panel in troubleshooting the critical stages of the negotiations.”<sup>14</sup> One American statesman of this century writes: “I feel a special sense of obligation to share with a broader audience my experiences, insights, and recollections of my years as Secretary of State.... those years were truly historic.”<sup>15</sup> I feel exactly the same way, for the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks that produced the Peace Agreement were not ordinary events but were, as the MNLF Chairman said, “four solid years of peace process in our tortuous quest to open a new chapter in the life of our people.”<sup>16</sup> As an active participant of those historic events, I desire to share his insights with a broader audience and would like to put it on record for future reference.

My subject position as an involved insider does not necessarily represent a weakness in the attempt in this book to present a scholarly history of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. Indeed, as this account is presented from the perspective of an MNLF official, this book may help us to gain an even clearer understanding of the positions taken by the MNLF during the negotiations.

More importantly, it may also help us come up with practical insights on how to sustain the momentum of peacemaking in the region. This is important because, as former President Ramos had pointed out, “the root causes of the problems that led to these decades of conflict in Mindanao will not go away with this Agreement. Left unattended, they can worsen and undo much of the confidence and optimism created by the goodwill between us.”<sup>17</sup> There are lessons to be learned from the process that led to the Peace Agreement. The international community had observed that in those four years of negotiations, “both sides had overcome the antagonisms resulting from a lengthy war and the distrust arising from failures to implement

previous agreements. Not only had the negotiators tackled these difficulties, but they also appeared to have become friends.”<sup>18</sup>

Beyond telling a story, the writing of this book is an attempt to do the following:

1. Present a first-hand account of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks with the historical background of the Mindanao conflict from the writer’s perspective and bring to focus the importance of the Peace Agreement to National Security.
2. Present the critical and contentious issues resolved and the innovative ways the negotiators adopted to resolve them, as well as to look at the challenges that lie ahead.
3. Analyze the various factors that brought about the success of the GRP-MNLF Negotiations using Strategic Management framework analysis and draw lessons from these experiences in order to enhance the government’s current peacemaking efforts.
4. Come up with recommendations for the successful implementation of the Peace Agreement.
5. Present the National Security implications of the Peace Agreement

This book is not the story of the MNLF as an organization. It is not the story of their leaders. Nevertheless, this book contains background historical antecedents that led to the conflict, which I discuss before the narration brings us to the main subject that I begin to address in Chapter 2. This is very important, for this book assumes the form of a “narrative explanation,” which, according to a contemporary social scientist, “presumably presents an account of the linkages among events as a process leading to the outcome one seeks to explain.”<sup>19</sup>

The opinions and views expressed in this book, however, are solely mine and do not necessarily represent the official views of the MNLF, the OIC, and the GRP whose top officials are the principal characters in the negotiations. Nevertheless, there were actions that I made and statements I delivered to GRP and OIC officials and issued to the media during my stint as an MNLF Peace Emissary, Chairman of the MNLF Secretariat, and MNLF Spokesman—and these were officially sanctioned by MNLF leaders and hence will be cited in this book among my primary sources of materials.<sup>20</sup>

Actions and statements attributed to the MNLF and its leaders

were those that I had actually witnessed and received in the form of instructions and recorded in my personal diaries and in the official reports I prepared, as well as in the other documents that became part of the official papers of the negotiations.

Statements attributed to the GRP and OIC are based on officially issued statements, official records of the Talks, and those messages entrusted to me that I delivered to the MNLF in my capacity as Peace Emissary.

Any error that may arise in the presentation of this story is my responsibility alone. This kind of work and all such works of this sort are “highly subjective—not only in terms of the author’s own perspective as a participant, but also in terms of the subject matter. By its very nature, this narrative is only a slice of near-history, and an incomplete one at that.”<sup>21</sup> Noted historians would say, “Our knowledge of any past event is always incomplete, probably inaccurate, beclouded by ambivalent evidence and biased historians, and perhaps distorted by our own patriotic or religious partisanship”.<sup>22</sup>

**Chapter 1** contains the **Historical Background** of the study. It appears as a lengthy presentation of Moro history from the coming of Islam to the current crisis in the Muslim leadership. It also includes the territorial jurisdiction of the Sultanate of Sulu in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. This is the main context of the GRP-MNLF conflict and negotiations. The complexities of the negotiations cannot be understood and its ramifications appreciated without the presentation of these historical antecedents.

The next five chapters constitute the main body of the “story” behind the GRP-MNLF Negotiations (1992-1996).

**Chapter 2** is entitled “**Inclination Towards Peace: The Exploratory Talks, 1992-1993.**” It tells of certain initiatives conducted by the GRP for the resumption of the peace talks with the MNLF and of how the latter responded with the concurrence of the OIC. The chapter also details the adoption of confidence building measures (CBM) that led to the start of the Formal Talks.

**Chapter 3** narrates the important events that transpired during the **First Round of GRP-MNLF Formal Talks** held in Jakarta, Indonesia from October to November 1993 and the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement and the Interim Ceasefire Agreement.



**Chapter 4** is entitled “1994: Taking the High Road to Peace.” It tells of the Support and Mixed Committee meetings held in the country and the challenges (e.g. threats from the Abu Sayyaf) faced by the parties as they proceeded with the negotiations, and how they overcame them through the adoption of mutual confidence measures, the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, and finally the signing of the 1994 Interim Agreement.

**Chapter 5** is entitled “1995: The Race Against Time.” It narrates the events that led to the signing of the 1995 Interim Agreement such as the informal meetings of certain government officials with the MNLF leaders and the OIC Special Ministerial Meeting held in New York, USA on the occasion of the United Nations’ 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration.

**Chapter 6** is entitled “1996: The Moment of Truth.” It tells of the stage when the negotiation reached an impasse’ on the most critical issue and how the GRP reacted to that situation. More importantly, this part of the story tells of how the OIC, through the initiatives of Indonesia and Libya, handled its mediation efforts to the satisfaction of both parties (GRP and MNLF) and how it led to more favorable circumstances that ended in the MNLF accepting the ARMM and finally the signing of the Peace Agreement in September 1996.

**Chapter 7** represents my own analysis of the historical data presented in the previous chapters. It begins with a qualitative analysis of these negotiations using strategic management frameworks in order to highlight the issues and relate them to national security. My analysis is buttressed by three things—the historical scholarship on the so-called Mindanao conflict, the concept of “principled negotiation” in conflict resolution theory, and Zartman and Touval’s concept of “third-party diplomacy.” It then moves on to my conclusions and recommendations regarding the effective implementation of the peace agreement. Finally, this chapter ends with a brief discussion of the concept of national security and the national Security implications of the peace agreement.

I have formulated these recommendations while keeping in mind the legitimate aspirations of the Muslim Filipinos for political autonomy within the framework of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippine state. The final chapter discusses the

recommendations and how they can directly contribute to the achievement of objective conditions favorable to national security in its various dimensions, which include territorial Integrity, ecological balance, political stability, economic solidarity, cultural cohesiveness, moral-spiritual consensus, and external peace.

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## Endnotes for Introduction

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- <sup>1</sup> “5<sup>th</sup> Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) Resolution No. 18.” MNLF Secretariat File. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 25 June 1974.
- <sup>2</sup> “The Peace Agreement: The Final Peace Agreement on the Implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) with the participation of the Organization of Islamic Conference Ministerial Committee of the Six and the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference, Manila, 2 September 1996.”
- <sup>3</sup> Fidel V. Ramos. “Break Not The Peace: We are All Victors,” (Speech delivered during the signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, 2 September 1996).
- <sup>4</sup> Indonesia Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. Official Statement (Delivered during the signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, Malacanang, Manila, 2 September, 1996).
- <sup>5</sup> Dr. Hamid Algabid, OIC Secretary General. Official Statement. (Delivered during the signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, 2 September 1996.)
- <sup>6</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari. Official Statement. (Delivered during the signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, 2 September, 1996.)
- <sup>7</sup> Fidel V. Ramos. *Break Not The Peace: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks, 1992-1996*. Manila: Friends of Steady Eddie, 1996, p. i.
- <sup>8</sup> Misuari. Official Statement...
- <sup>9</sup> Ramos. *Break Not the Peace...*p. ii.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. (This book basically gives the Philippine government account of the negotiations).
- <sup>11</sup> Soliman M. Santos, Jr. “The Philippine-Muslim Dispute: International Aspects from Origin to Resolution (The Role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in the Peace Negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippine and the Moro National Liberation Front).” Unpublished, January 1999. (A research paper in International Dispute Resolution in the Master of Laws Program at the University of Melbourne, Australia.).
- <sup>12</sup> Richard Holbrooke. *To End A War*. New York, USA: Random House Inc., 1998), p. “Note to the Reader.”

- <sup>13</sup> Mara Stankovitch, ed. "Compromising on Autonomy: Mindanao in Transition" in *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*. London: Conciliation Resources in association with the Research and Development Center, Mindanao State University, General Santos City and Peace Education Center, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, Issue 6, 1999. p. 8.
- <sup>14</sup> Letter of Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process and Chairman, GRP Panel Negotiating with the MNLF, to President Fidel V. Ramos, dated April 4, 1997.
- <sup>15</sup> James A. Baker III with Thomas M. Defrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992*. New York, USA: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995, p. xiii.
- <sup>16</sup> Misuari, Official Statement...
- <sup>17</sup> President Ramos, "Break Not the Peace..."
- <sup>18</sup> Stankovitch, "Compromising..." *Accord...* p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Paul A. Roth, "Narrative Explanations: The Case of History," in *Selected Readings—NSA 203 (Policy Science and Research Methods)*. NDCP, 1999, Chapter 13, p. 94.
- <sup>20</sup> Statements made by this writer during the Peace Talks were cited in the book written by President Ramos (*Break Not the Peace*), the Accord, and the one by Arnold Molina Azurin, *Beyond the Cult of Dissidence*, (University of the Philippines Press and U.P. Center for Integrative and Development Studies, 1996, p. 124), among others.
- <sup>21</sup> Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy...* p. xiv.
- <sup>22</sup> Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History*. New York, USA: Simon & Schuster, 1968, pp. 11-12.





## Historical Background



This writer inside an MNLF Camp in Basilan with Asmad Abdul, self-confessed Abu Sayyaf intelligence and MNLF Commander Ustadz Bashir and his staff during the negotiation for the release of Fr. Bernardo Blanco.  
April 22, 1993

## The Peace Times

*The Coming of Islam.* For over 200 years prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the Muslims lived in peace and harmony among themselves and with their neighbors and had even established trade and diplomatic relations with China. The advent of Islam antedated the arrival of Spain by two centuries. The coming of two of the great world religions to the archipelago is an epic story.<sup>1</sup> Sulu was the first to accept Islam in the early part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Corpuz says, "Islam was brought by the individual efforts of men who came looking for a new home and, because they could not live well without their religion, introduced it and its supporting institutions in their new homeland."<sup>2</sup>

Cesar Majul points to a venerated grave of a foreign Muslim dated 710 Hijrah (or 1310 A.D.), possibly of an Arab, in Bud Datu, a few miles from Jolo.<sup>3</sup> About two generations later, Sulu witnessed the coming of Muslim missionaries as part of movements that covered Java and the north of Borneo.<sup>4</sup> Muslim missionaries (called *Makhdums*), traders, and merchants were the ones that brought Islam to the area. For over two centuries, the Muslim settlements lived in peace and harmony with their neighbors.

*Diplomatic Relations with China.* In the year 1417, the Eastern King of Sulu and two other Kings—the Western King and the King of the Mountains—visited with their entourage the celestial throne of China. This was described in the *Ming Annals*. They presented a letter of gold, with characters engraved upon it, and offered pearls, precious stones, tortoise-shell and other articles.<sup>5</sup>

The Eastern King died on his way home to Sulu. He was buried in Shantung Province, China upon orders of the Emperor. This place is now Dezhou City, northeast of Shantung Province. It is known as the "Tomb of the East King of the Sulu Kingdom," which is the only tomb of a foreign monarch in China.

*The Sultanate of Sulu.* The Muslim communities in Sulu developed into a strong Sultanate in 1450 with the arrival of Shariful Hashim Abubakar, believed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He married Paramisuli, daughter princess of Rajah Baguinda, a Muslim Prince who arrived in Sulu earlier from Sumatra. Shariful Hashim Abubakar founded the Sultanate by uniting the

different kingdoms in Sulu. Among other works, the Sultan established *Madrasa* (Islamic schools) and applied *Shariah* as the laws of the Sultanate.<sup>6</sup>

The Sultanate of Sulu was the first organized government in the archipelago that became the Philippines.

The geographical position of Sulu played an important part in making the Sultanate the most advanced political entity in the Philippines at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards.<sup>7</sup> Sulu, occupying the most nearly central position of any island in eastern Malaysia, stood to gain immense commercial advantages from this position, with Luzon, Japan, and Formosa to its north, to its south the Moluccas, Celebes, and Java, and to the west, Borneo and the Malay Peninsula. Trade had gone on between Sulu and these countries for centuries before the Spaniards arrived, and it was said that "Jolo, with the exception of Brunei, had no rival in North East Malaysia prior to the seventeenth century."<sup>8</sup>

In the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a certain Arab named Sharif Kabungsuwan arrived in the mouth of the Pulangi River and started the spread of Islam in mainland Mindanao.<sup>9</sup> He also founded the Sultanate of Maguindanao. From Maguindanao, Islam reached the Lanao areas in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Then Islam reached as far north as Luzon. Manila was a progressive Muslim settlement under Rajah Soliman but was destroyed by the Spaniards in 1572.

Nevertheless, it was in Mindanao and Sulu that Islam had taken root. It blended with pre-Islamic socio-cultural practices of the local population, which even strengthened their cohesiveness as a community. It did not destroy the developing indigenous political culture, which was then similar to those in Luzon and the Visayas. And by introducing the Sultanate system, Islam hastened the state process in the southern islands by providing a superstructure over the otherwise scattered *datuships*.

A religious system was also developed which emphasized greater loyalty to the *Ummah* rather than to the local leadership. Yet Islam allowed the local *datuship* to remain active in the decision-making process through the *Ruma Bechara* (the Council of Elders) of the Sultan.<sup>11</sup> Islamic development was marked by incorporation of and accommodation to local practices in all aspects.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, the Muslim Sultanates of Sulu and Mindanao



developed the capability and will to resist the Spaniards as they were sustained by the special features of their culture. Islam enabled them to feel that they were members of a community larger than their *barangays*—the Muslim *Ummah*.<sup>13</sup>

*Ummah* (*Ummat*) is an Arabic word which means ‘nation’. A nation ‘justly balanced’ because “the essence of Islam is to avoid extravagance on either side. It is a sober practical religion.”<sup>14</sup> The Holy Qur’an says: “Thus have We<sup>15</sup> made of you an *Ummat* justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Apostle a witness over yourselves,” (Sura II, verse 143). It is generally understood to mean the Muslim World.

The social institutions of Islam that they had integrated into their local cultures had stood up to the strongest pressures in the West.<sup>16</sup> An American Protestant writer, Peter Gowing, asserts:

Islam brought to the people of the Southern Philippines a higher standard of conduct and written codes of laws. It carried contributions from the literature, arts and sciences of Islamic civilization. It introduced the Islamic calendar and adapted Arabic writing to the major languages. Most important of all, Islam modified the basically *barangay* type of native social and political organization and developed the Moro *datuship* and sultanate. As noted above, Islam provided a bond of unity among its adherents, and a measure of organizational cohesiveness unknown to the non-Muslim Filipino groups, which enabled the Moros to offer effective resistance to Spanish incursions.<sup>17</sup>

## The Wars Began

*The Coming of Spain.* The winds of war came with the arrival of the Spaniards and the introduction of Christianity to the archipelago. Christianity came, writes O.D. Corpuz, “with the fire of the fanatic Hispanic branch. Fresh from their *reconquest* of Granada from the Moors (Muslims of North Africa) in 1492, they crossed the Pacific Ocean...and again met their ancient enemy halfway around the world from the arena of their earlier conflict.”<sup>18</sup> The Spanish version of Christianity was introduced through “massive military and religious campaigns to subdue local armed resistance and stamp out indigenous religious beliefs and practices.”<sup>19</sup>

Spain conducted what they considered a just war against the natives whom they called *Indios* by applying a unique Spanish

colonial institution—the *encomienda*. It was not really motivated by the desire to convert the natives to Christianity but by the need to exact more tributes from them. The colonizers' version of Christianity closed their eyes to the suffering of the very people whom they had brought into their own religion.<sup>20</sup>

But how could so few Spaniards conquer so many people? Corpuz poses the idea that “the Spanish conquistadors were not only brave...they were veterans of Spain's wars...the mentality of their leaders sprang from a boundless confidence, a fusion of righteousness and arrogance undaunted by the challenge of the unknown.”<sup>21</sup>

A noted Filipino anthropologist, F. Landa Jocano, presents another explanation: “The local population in Luzon and Visayas easily succumbed to Spanish colonial incursions because of ‘cultural shock’, an overwhelming psychological feeling of inadequacy and disorientation in the face of a fully –armed, powerful group—which paralyzed them into inaction even before the battle began.”<sup>22</sup>

Jocano clarifies, however, that this did not work “with the Filipinos who were already Muslim by religion when the Spaniards came. The new weapons did not impress the latter because they were familiar with the use of explosives and they had an organized religion to reinforce their political institutions.... In Manila, Mindanao and Sulu, the Spaniards suffered major military setbacks.”<sup>23</sup>

“In fact”, as Corpuz argues, “of all the Filipinos of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, it was only the Muslims who were consciously sustained by a cause that made surrender or submission to the Spaniards morally impossible. This moral cause was Islam.”<sup>24</sup>

As Spain succeeded in establishing the Kingdom of Filipinas covering Luzon and Visayas under the banner of Catholicism and founded on the disappearance and ruins of many old *barangays*, the Muslim Sultanates remained with most of their indigenous culture intact and even reinforced by the universal principles of Islam.

Then the natives began to be differentiated into Muslims and Non-Muslims or the Christians and the Non-Christians. In the 1650s, there were three political dominions in the archipelago: Filipinas, the Sultanate of Maguindanao, and the Sultanate of Sulu.<sup>25</sup>

While the Muslim Sultanates persisted with their wars against Spain for over three centuries, the Christian natives suffered under

Spanish tyranny and in some instances even became willing pawns of Spanish conquistadors against their southern brethren during those wars.

*Historical Lessons.* The questions to be asked are: Has religion divided the people in the archipelago? What rationale has been behind the categorical classification of Filipinos into Muslims and non-Muslims, or Christians and Non-Christians?

The fundamental teachings of these two great world religions do not teach divisiveness among their respective believers. But religion definitely shaped the consciousness of the people and their worldview. "What happened," writes Gowing, "was the rise of two *nationalities*—where before there had been no *nationality*—one Filipino Muslim, and the other Filipino Christian. Historical circumstances have thrust these two nationalities into one Philippine State and the problems of their religious, social, economic and political accommodation to each other have impeded the achievement of a unified consciousness."<sup>26</sup>

Majul argues further:

Certainly, almost up to the end of the nineteenth century, there was no such thing as a Filipino people in the sense we now understand it. It is well known that the Christian natives of the Archipelago generally came to be called 'Indios' and the Moslems of the South 'Moros.' But there are many historical factors, which have contributed to the progressive transformation of the 'Indio' and 'Moro' into Filipino belonging to a national community. This process, not unaccompanied by conflict, has been gradual but inevitable.<sup>27</sup>

*The Moro Wars.* Spanish authorities in Manila under Governor Francisco Sande sent expeditions to Jolo against the Muslims. Indeed, the wars that lasted for over three centuries (1578-1898) left the Muslims unconquered, for they "fought for home and country, for freedom to pursue their religion and way of life and for liberty.... for three centuries, they made shambles of Spain's Moro policy."<sup>28</sup> The wars helped define the Muslim Filipino's "attitude and relations to all non-Muslim foreigners as well as to non-Muslim Filipinos."<sup>29</sup>

Majul calls these "The Moro Wars," which he famously summarizes into six stages.<sup>30</sup>

Another author describes "The Wars" as "a struggle between Spanish expansionism and the desire of Mindanao Muslims to preserve

their freedom and religion.... [in which] the Spaniards were the aggressors... [and] the wars were opened to advance Spain's national interests."<sup>31</sup>

Another Filipino historian writes:

The wars were unique in that they spanned the entire era of Spanish rule in the Philippines. They demonstrated Moro tenacity in their struggles to preserve their homeland against Spanish colonialism. Fighting back to maintain their independent existence, the Moros of Mindanao and Sulu, with their allies, attacked many places in Luzon, the Visayas and northern Mindanao from the inception of Spanish colonization of the Philippines. The Moro retaliatory attacks on Christianized settlements were so devastating that Spanish colonial writers referred to them as "Moro raids" or "Moro piracies". The Spaniards spread many negative ideas about the Moros of Mindanao and Sulu thereby deepening the division between the inhabitants of northern and southern Philippines.<sup>32</sup>

It was during the fourth stage of the Moro Wars that Maguindanao Sultan Qudarat declared Jihad<sup>33</sup> against Spain in 1656.<sup>34</sup> Yet despite more than three centuries of wars, Spain failed to subjugate the people of Mindanao and Sulu. The old *barangays* who had adopted Islam and had become united under the Sultanate fought to preserve their freedom, their homeland, and their religion.

The conquered *barangays* in the north, having succumbed to the might and dominance of Catholic Spain, resigned to the idea of a loss of freedom. In the late 16<sup>th</sup> and mid- 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, they tried to shake off the conquerors, but each revolt was suppressed by the Spaniards with the use of native auxiliaries mostly coming from the Visayas. The natives were exhausted after their defeat, and they settled down by the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

*The Territorial Dominions of the Sultanate of Sulu.* By this time, the Sultanate of Sulu included in its domains, the Sulu Archipelago, Palawan, Basilan and North Borneo.<sup>36</sup> Even prior to this, the power of the Sulus was felt all over Luzon and the Visayas Islands, the Celebes Sea, Palawan, North Borneo and the China Sea and their trade extended from China and Japan, at one extreme, to Malacca, Sumatra and Java at the other.<sup>37</sup> Jolo, its capital, not only became a trade center, trading with China, Cambodia, Japan and even Arabia but also controlled part of the trade in spices from the Moluccas.<sup>38</sup>

In the year 1704, the Sultan of Sulu acquired North Borneo

(Sabah) from the Sultan of Brunei after the former helped the latter put down a rebellion of a rival claimant.<sup>39</sup>

For 174 years since 1704, the Sultan of Sulu was sovereign over North Borneo. It was during the time of Sultan Jamalul Ahlam in 1878 that a lease contract was signed in favor of the North Borneo British Company in order to raise the money to buy guns to defend Sulu from an impending Spanish attack from Manila.

The British, French, Spanish, Germans and the Dutch concluded treaties of trade and commerce with the Sultan of Sulu in order to promote their commercial interest. They concluded treaties of friendship and alliance when it became necessary to win the Sultan as an ally against the rivalry put up by other powers. At all times, the Western powers treated the Sultan as a sovereign.<sup>40</sup>

Sultan Jamalul Ahlam died in 1881. His son, Sultan Badaruddin II succeeded him but died in 1884. His death was followed by civil war in Sulu due to rivalry to the throne. Sultan Harun Al-Rashid, who descended from Sultan Alimuddin, and living in Palawan, was supported by Spanish authorities in Manila. He failed to get the support of the majority of the people.

In 1888, three years after the signing of the Sulu Protocol of 1885 and while Sulu was in the throes of civil war, the "State of North Borneo," by an agreement between the British North Borneo Company and Great Britain was made a British Protectorate apparently without the knowledge or consent of the Sultan of Sulu from whom alone, by official admission of the British Government itself, the North Borneo Company derived its rights and powers to govern the territory.<sup>41</sup>

*The Forming of a Nation.* During this period, a culture was fashioned by the natives out of their experience in colonial life. It was overt obedience and accommodations to the alien regime. Corpuz even concludes that while the natives were fashioning a culture that included accommodations to what could not be avoided in colonial life, they nevertheless made it the vehicle for preserving parts of the old culture. This kind of submission promoted artifice, shrewdness, agility and opportunism. This attitude has survived until today, as contemporary Filipino behavior tends to accommodate abusive and corrupt central government with a feeling of indifference.<sup>42</sup>

This is “folk culture,” asserts Corpuz, “the fashioning of which has enormous importance in the development of the Filipino people and nation.”<sup>43</sup> There is also this racial infusion that, according to Corpuz, has produced a Filipino nation that is multi-racial rather than a purely Malay people. “The natives finally joined the non-natives, the Chinese *mestizos*, the Spanish *mestizos*, and the Creoles (Spanish born in Filipinas), and together they formed what was to become the Filipino nation.”<sup>44</sup>

But this “nation” had to be a unitary Christian nation. The First Philippine Republic was proclaimed in Kawit, Cavite on June 12, 1896 with Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo as the President. During the Malolos Congress of 1898, President Aguinaldo “asked for authority to negotiate with the Muslims of Jolo and Maguindanao ‘for the purpose of establishing national solidarity upon the basis of a real federation and of absolute respect for their beliefs and traditions.’”<sup>45</sup>

“Unfortunately,” writes Corpuz, “the Malolos Congress, which was composed of Christians, either lacked the capacity to appreciate Aguinaldo’s concept of a nation that included both Christians and Muslims, or could not see themselves in one nation with the Muslims...the matter was not pushed.”<sup>46</sup> The proposal was therefore rejected.

The Aguinaldo proposal was contained in his letter to the Sultan of Sulu dated January 19, 1899, which reads:<sup>47</sup>

The President of the Philippine Republic very cordially greets his great and powerful brother, the Sultan of Jolo, and makes known:

That the Filipinos, after having thrown off the yoke of foreign domination cannot forget their brothers of Jolo to whom they are bound by the ties of race, interests, security and defense in this region of the Far East.

The Philippine Republic has resolved to respect absolutely the beliefs and traditions of each island in order to establish on solid bases the bonds of fraternal unity demanded by our mutual interests.

I therefore in the name of all the Filipinos very gladly offer to the powerful Sultan of Jolo and to all brothers who acknowledge his great authority, the highest assurances of friendship, consideration and esteem.

Malolos, January 19, 1899

"It is not improbable," Corpuz posits, "that the cultural bias and political neglect by the Christian majority vis-à-vis the Muslim Filipinos during the American regime and during the Republic would not have been possible had the Christian lawyers in the Malolos Congress appreciated Aguinaldo's vision of the Filipino nation. It is probable, on the other hand, that the Moro National Liberation Front rebellion of the early 1970s was the inevitable bitter fruit of that lack of appreciation."<sup>48</sup>

While the Malolos Congress envisioned a united Christian Nation, the Moros of Mindanao and Sulu remained with their own separate views of history. The Sultan of Sulu did not make a positive reply to Aguinaldo's proposal. The Muslim South therefore did not become part of the emerging Filipino nation as contemplated in the Malolos Constitution. As Corpuz relates:

Since the Constitution referred to a nation but had no provision defining the national territory, and since Aguinaldo's proposals on the Muslims were in effect rejected by Congress, it is an unsettled issue whether Muslim Mindanao and the islands from Basilan to the south until the Tawi-Tawi group, were part of the Republic of Filipinas. That they were later on made part of the Philippines under the colonial occupation of the American regime means a whole world of difference from if they had become part of the Republic under the fraternal approach of Aguinaldo's concept of "national solidarity upon the basis of a real federation and of absolute respect for their beliefs and traditions. *In any case, historically speaking, there was an imperfect consolidation of the Christian and Muslim Filipinos in one national community.*" This was rooted in the long era of Christian-Muslim wars during the Spanish regime, followed by Muslims' non-participation in the Revolution [italics mine].<sup>49</sup>

When Spain left in 1898, the Moros of Southern Philippines were still in control of more than a third of the total land area of the whole Archipelago. This was a fact, which the Americans could not and did not ignore.<sup>50</sup>

*The Treaty of Paris.* And yet at the end of the American-Spanish War, which culminated with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898, these Moro territories were defined as belonging to Spain and were therefore ceded to the Americans under the said Treaty. The Sultanate of Sulu refused to recognize the Treaty as binding on the Sultanate and so with the Sultanate of Maguindanao and those in the Lanao areas. "They could not understand how Spain, which had never achieved effective sovereignty over them, could

transfer 'sovereignty' to yet another foreign nation."<sup>51</sup> One American visitor to Moroland who tried to look at the situation from a Moro perspective wrote in 1936:

In examining the American occupation of Mindanao and Sulu from the viewpoint of the Moros, one must question the legality of our claim on this country. The transfer of money from America to Spain meant selling out the Moros' own country from underneath them. The transfer was effected without their knowledge or consent. The Moros had no part in the welter of politics and sugar disputes that provoke the Spanish-American War. The title of the seller of Mindanao and Sulu was impaired, for Spain had failed to conquer this country. She had held sovereignty by proclamation – not by force of arms.

The Moro... was an invaded barbarian, fighting on his own soil for the defense of that soil. Spain crossed the ocean to enter the territory of the Moros. America crossed the ocean to force the jungle trails of Mindanao and Sulu.

The Moros had the right to resistance. As in the campaigns against Spain, the Moro was entitled to the choice of weapons in his conflict with America. It was a war not of his own choosing; America brought the war to Mindanao. If the Moro chose to fight his way, from the shelter of his jungle bush, it remained for the invader of that soil to take his own chances.

They do not need condolences. They are the hardiest of all of the races of man. But the fact remains that this little group of unorganized Malays went against the Gatling guns and artillery of the most powerful nation in the world. They died on their own soil before the superior weapons and armaments of an invading army. They pitted a *Kris* against a *krag* rifle. They raised a *barong* against the fire of mountain artillery. If they cut and slashed in the night and ambushed from besides a jungle trail, they were well within their rights.

For these reasons, the severity of some of the campaigns against the Moros is to be condemned rather than condoned. The American was equally as culpable as the Spaniards. The Spaniard brought religion at the point of an arquebus. The American brought law to an inferior and minor people at the point of a Krag.

Our claim on Mindanao and Sulu was weak indeed. <sup>52</sup>

Corpuz concludes: "Spain sold something it did not own or possess. What it sold was paper; pieces of paper that said that Sulu was part of the Spanish Crown and that Mindanao and Basilan and Sulu and Tawi-Tawi were a province of Filipinas."<sup>53</sup>



## The Wars Continued

*The Coming of the Americans.* With the Treaty of Paris in their hands, the Americans came to the Philippines with a mandate based on “vague notions of America’s ‘Manifest Destiny’ as a Pacific power and on ill-defined sentiments about ‘picking up the White Mans’ burden.’”<sup>54</sup> But the Philippine revolutionaries would not allow another group of white men to rule them. War broke out in February 1899 and lasted up to 1906.

While fighting a war in Luzon, the Americans also proceeded to come to Moroland because they “could not risk the eventuality of a Moro alliance with the insurgents.”<sup>55</sup> They did not come to fight the Muslim Sultans, however, but to negotiate peace with them. And so the so-called Kiram-Bates Treaty was signed on August 20, 1899. Sultan Jamalul Kiram II signed for the Sultanate of Sulu and Brig. Gen. John C. Bates signed for the United States of America. The Agreement, known as the Bates Agreement, governed the relations between the United States and Sulu from 1899 through the formation of the Moro Province in 1903.<sup>56</sup>

In October 1899, Mindanao and Sulu were initially placed under a newly created Military District.”<sup>57</sup> This was then further divided into sub-districts because the Americans “recognized that the political character of the Christian Filipinos of northern Mindanao was different from both that of Moros of the southern and western parts of the island and the so-called ‘wild-people’ of the interior.”<sup>58</sup>

In 1902, “the so called ‘Philippine Bill,’ passed by the United States Congress on July 1, 1902, recognized the distinction between the Moros, Pagans and Christian Filipinos and the consequent necessity of providing different forms of government for the different groups of people.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, on June 1, 1903 “the Moro Province was created by Philippine Commission Act. No. 787, also known as “An Act Providing for the Organization and Government of the Moro Province.”<sup>60</sup>

But despite the establishment of this “carefully thought out and ingenious design of the Moro Province,”<sup>61</sup> the American occupation was not without resistance from the Moro population. The violent reactions did not come from the Sultans who were by then already co-opted by the American Government but from the different datus

who did not want to accept direct American rule:

The Moros did not take kindly to the new order of things, which are distasteful to them in every respect. They resented any interference with their customs or habits of life and regarded the appearance of the white man in their villages as an unwarranted and offensive intrusion. This was generally true of all the Moros and especially so of those inhabiting the Lanao district.<sup>62</sup>

Even as early as 1902, the American Government had to wage a pacification campaign against the Lanao Datus of Bayan invoking the Treaty of Paris of 1899. The Maranao Datus believed that the American friendly approach was “merely a stratagem to invade their country without fighting in order to rob the Moros of their land and homes.”<sup>63</sup>

In 1904, Datu Ali of Kudarangan attempted to raise the entire Cotabato Valley in revolt against the Americans. He put up a *kuta* (fort), “reportedly the largest ever constructed, could have held a garrison of four or five thousand men.”<sup>64</sup> Datu Ali was not an ordinary outlaw. He became a respected friend of Dr. Najeeb Saleeby who tried but failed to bring him to have a peaceful settlement with the Americans.<sup>65</sup> But “the Datu and several hundred of his followers were killed in the battle which followed—one of the bloodiest battles ever fought with the Moros.”<sup>66</sup>

Throughout 1903 and 1904, the Americans had to fight their way into the Maranao country in Lanao because “some Lanao sultans and datus, and their followers, simply could not be reconciled to the *gobirno a sarawang tao* (a foreign government). This resulted in what is now called as The Taraca Expeditions where the Americans won “by virtue of their superior arms...many Moros were killed and their *cotas* destroyed.”<sup>67</sup>

In Sulu, prominent Moro chiefs put up a bloody resistance against the Americans: Panglima Hassan, Datu Laksamana Usap and Datu Pala. They declared *Jihad* (Holy War) against the American *kapil* (infidels). All of them were killed in separate battles with the Americans who used superior arms against them.<sup>68</sup>

Then on March 6, 1906, a terrible battle began in Bud Dajo (Dajo Mountain—an extinct volcano near Jolo town). “The Moros called it ‘The Battle of the Clouds,’ because the crater of Bud Dajo (2,100 feet above sea level) was fringed with clouds.”<sup>69</sup> “Six hundred

Tausog men, women, and children gathered at the crater. They were families who had abandoned their homes because they refused to live under American or any other foreign rule; they refused to pay the *cedula*<sup>70</sup> (head tax) to the Americans. The battle lasted for three days." The Combat was fierce. Moro women, dressed in men's clothes, fought side by side with their husbands. The slaughter was terrible. On the morning of March 8, when the battle ended, more than 600 Moros were dead. The American forces counted 94 casualties (21 killed, 73 wounded).<sup>71</sup>

The details of the battle reached the United States, and "General Leonard Wood was severely criticized for the carnage, particularly those involving women and children. The Washington Post pictured Wood as a bloodthirsty monster difficult to parallel in history. The New York World published a cartoon showing him standing over his victims with a dripping sword."<sup>72</sup>

The assessment that "the forcing of the Tausugs into a last stand averted what would have been a long drawn out strife that would have cost more lives," was proven wrong.<sup>73</sup> "The conflict continued...Americans would be attacked by *juramentados* or ambush parties." And in 1913 another bloody battle followed: "The Battle of Bud Bagsak." Bagsak Mountain is also in Jolo Island. This battle took place during the time of General Pershing, then the Governor General of Moro Province. He even "saw action, often exposing himself to fire" during that battle.<sup>74</sup> Government accounts of the battle were: 14 killed and 13 wounded; the American Army "did not release the number of Moros killed but newspaper reports in Manila said that Bagsak had been defended by 500 Moros, nearly all of them were killed."<sup>75</sup>

The Battle of Bud Bagsak "was the last large-scale action fought by Americans in the Moro country until their final withdrawal from the Philippines.<sup>76</sup> The Americans "dropped the Moro campaigns to enter the First World War."<sup>77</sup> Then a civilian-run government that was put in place "pursued a 'policy of attraction' and escalated the implementation of health, educational and public works in Moroland."<sup>78</sup>

But as the Moros were just beginning to respond positively to a more humane 'policy of attraction,' the American Administrators in 1920, following the spirit of the Jones Law of 1916, precipitously

transferred effective control of Moroland to Christian Filipinos...due to pressures from Filipino nationalism.<sup>79</sup> "The nationalists considered it an 'incomprehensible anomaly' that Christian Filipinos could govern municipalities and provinces 'of the greatest degree of civilization' but the Philippine Assembly was denied the right to legislate for the Moro Province."<sup>80</sup>

In 1926, a US Congressman, after completing an investigative tour of Moroland filed House Resolution No. 12772 in the US Congress and argued thus:

These Christian Filipinos have no ... right... to determine the government of the Moro people nor to shape the solution of the Moro Problem according to their particular interests. This right was not given them by the Treaty of Paris, is in violation of the conditions whereby the Moro leaders gave submission and obedience to American authority, and should never have been conceded by the Congress of the United States. If a reversionary right ... exists in anyone, it is the Moro and not the Christian Filipino who is entitled thereto.<sup>81</sup>

His report was ignored. What followed was then a policy of integrating the Moros into the mainstream of Philippine life. But this policy was seriously obstructed by at least three circumstances: 1) the atmosphere of mutual suspicion between American and Christian Filipino officials; 2) continued Moro resistance to their incorporation into the Philippine State; and 3) the priority given to the national economic development and security considerations in Moroland.<sup>82</sup>

In the remaining years of American rule, the Moros continued to petition the authorities in Manila and Washington to regard them as different from the rest of the people of the Archipelago, and either grant them independence or retain them under American rule. Because, the Moro said, "the Philippine Legislature has failed to work for the benefit of our people... it is our firm intention and resolve to declare our selves an independent sultanate to be known as the Moro Nation."<sup>83</sup>

But despite all these protestations including the recommendations of some American leaders and some violent but small-scale resistance, the destiny of the Moro people was placed in the hands of "the politicians in Manila."<sup>84</sup>

## The Philippine Commonwealth

Samuel Tan argues that the social justice program outlined in 1935 by President Quezon “failed to bring benefits to the Muslim people” as a result of the disruptions wrought by the Second World War “while Christian officials and settlers continued to take advantage of Muslim ignorance.” The “quality of Muslim education...was far behind that of the Christian north.... the effect was to place the key positions of the government in the hands of educated Christian Filipinos. The Muslims, for lack of educational qualifications, lost even the right to govern themselves. The exclusion of Muslims from political leadership in their own areas was one of the injustices which widened the credibility gap of the government and hardened the resentment of the Muslim people.”<sup>85</sup>

In the economic front, the Muslims found themselves marginalized. “In Sulu... the chief problems were related to socio-economic ills, such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of sanitation, poor roads ... the closing of free trade with Borneo, and strong competition from non-Muslims in fishing homeland waters resulted in limited opportunities for legitimate employment for Sulu’s expanding population.”<sup>86</sup>

“In Mindanao... the chief problem, though not the only one, was the competition for land...Moros believed that they little benefited from the exploitation of the resources of their region at the hands of these outside concessionaires...Cotabato and Lanao were the areas of Moroland most dramatically affected by the postwar influx of thousands of migrant families.”<sup>87</sup> “Christian colonization was encouraged by the government policy of ‘land to the landless’ and by the mystique of Mindanao as the ‘land of opportunity.’ In Koronadal Valley, Cotabato, the Christian population increased phenomenally from 18 in 1939 to 30,000 in 1960.”<sup>88</sup>

*The Kamlon Uprising.* Hopes for better conditions began to dim during the period between 1950 and 1960. In 1951, the Kamlon Uprising erupted in Sulu. The National Government responded by ordering military operations against it. Senator Tomas L. Cabili was even reported to have said, “The Moros only understand force.”<sup>89</sup> In response, three Muslim Congressmen—Domocao Alonto, Sultan Ombra Amilbangsa, and Datu Luminog Mangelen—issued a

### Manifesto that said:

We do understand force. For centuries, the Muslim courageously and completely disregarding the strength of the enemy, has fought back at everyone, Spaniard, American and Christian Filipino, who has tried to use military force against him. It is safe to conclude that it will always be that way...the Senator seems to have forgotten the *lesson of history* that when met with chivalry, respect and understanding, our people always have responded wholeheartedly as witnessed by the high regard and genuine love our people have for the Americans who soon learned to substitute a policy of friendship for one of force... If the Government wants, peace and order restored in the Muslim provinces, it can be had without bloodshed, without suffering to innocent people and at a cost far less than that of the current operation. Give the Muslim people service instead of abuse by their local governments, fair and speedy justice, the education they are entitled to, freedom from fear and freedom from want, and outlawry will vanish, loose firearms will be a thing of the past, and a feeling of brotherhood will unite our cultural minority and the Christian majority... But if, on the other hand, the operation be permitted to proceed to the bitter end, Kamlon and his followers may all be killed along with hundred of our soldiers, innocent women and children may be slaughtered, but for generations to come, our people will listen to ballads about the heroic Kamlon and be urged to follow in his footsteps. The Manila Government will have given us a new hero, a martyr, a Muslim counterpart to Rizal... [Italics mine].”<sup>90</sup>

In the late 1960s, the Moro population particularly “the studentry, professionals and to some extent, the politicians, were locked in a debate over what course of action to pursue for the Moros, as a whole, to survive.”<sup>91</sup> The question was “Secession or Integration?”<sup>92</sup> “Under the Republic of the Philippines, Moroland turned out to be a deeply troubled region. The majority of its Muslim inhabitants seemed to be as alienated from the government in Manila as ever.”<sup>93</sup> Movements sprung up as a result of this alienation, one of which—the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM)—was even founded by the Governor of Cotabato, Datu Udto Matalam.

### The Mindanao War

*The Ilaga Atrocities against the Muslims.* Then the Ilaga emerged allegedly in reaction to the threats posed by the MIM to the Christians in Cotabato.<sup>94</sup> “Ilaga” is an Ilongo term for rats. It was reportedly organized by seven local Christian politicians who were bent upon preserving their respective power and expanding them

further by infiltrating and dominating areas traditionally controlled by Muslims.<sup>95</sup>

The Ilaga atrocities against the Muslims started in the second half of 1970 up to the middle part of 1972. Strings of massacres against Muslims were perpetrated by the Ilaga with the support and connivance of Christian capitalists and military personnel in the area. The massacre of Muslims and the burning of their houses and mosques were repeated many times in the other Muslims areas.<sup>96</sup>

Except for the meager assistance given to a small number of evacuees and refugees, the government practically did nothing to stop the atrocities... It did nothing to arrest the individuals reportedly involved in the leadership of the Ilaga... The failure of the government to stop the Ilaga atrocities and to identify its real mastermind and leaders, and to arrest and jail those publicly known among them—led many Muslims (including some officials in the government) to believe that the military was involved.<sup>97</sup>

The concentrations of Ilaga atrocities were initially in Lanao and Cotabato provinces and then moved to Zamboanga areas.

*The Rise of Moro Youth and the founding of the MNLF.* The latest phase of the Moro struggle commenced in the wake of the so-called Corregidor massacre in March 1968. Innocent Bangsamoro youth were lured into a clandestine military organization reportedly to invade the Muslim State of Sabah but they all, except for one who managed to tell the tale, ended up dead in a cold-blooded massacre. This became known in history as the *Jabidah Massacre*.

It started with a destabilization plan by the Marcos government aimed at Sabah called Operation Merdeka. This involved recruiting Moro youths for specialized training and mobilizing them for operations against Sabah, after which the Philippine military could “rescue” Sabah and subsequently claim it from Malaysia. The name of the commando unit to be formed was “Jabidah.” More than 150 youths were recruited who did not fully know the purpose of their training—they were just giddy over the promise not only of a monthly allowance and the prospect of eventually becoming a member of an elite unit in the Philippine Armed Forces.

Later on, however, the training turned mutinous when the recruits discovered their true mission. They realized they would be fighting their Muslim brother in Sabah and would possibly be killing their own Tausug and Sama relatives living there. Additionally, they were

disgruntled over the non-payment of the promised P50 monthly allowance. They then demanded to be returned home. That was when they were mowed down with gunfire.

It was after this incident that Datu Udtog Matalam founded the MIM. Barely two month after the Jabidah massacre, the MIM issued a Manifesto signed by Matalam on May 1, 1968 “to make manifest to the whole world its desire to secede from the Republic of the Philippines, in order to establish an Islamic State.”<sup>98</sup>

“The MIM did not gain much momentum and few outside his home province of Cotabato listened to him seriously enough. But it inspired the professionals and students in Manila who later formed the MNLF.”<sup>99</sup>

On the eve of that infamous massacre, the Moro youth conceived the founding of what later on became the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Nur Misuari who became the Chairman of the MNLF would say later:<sup>100</sup>

The Muslim students and younger elements among the Muslim people in the Bangsamoro Homeland were more firm and steadfast. They sat about to interpret the age-old resentment of the Bangsamoro people against tyranny and oppression of Filipino Christian government. This resentment, nurtured for centuries in the heart of the Bangsamoro people, was no doubt abetted by the carnage on Corregidor Island. The verdict was that under Marcos, the contradiction has soared to a new height. Under Marcos, Christian Filipino rule means continued enslavement of the Bangsamoro people.

The decision arrived at by the Muslim youth was that the contradiction could only be resolved by... armed struggle. But it was necessary to harness the energy of the Bangsamoro masses in this task. This assumption, therefore, gave birth to the MNLF which took upon itself the historic task of leading the revolutionary path for the primary objective of re-acquiring the Bangsamoro people's political freedom and independence and set themselves free from the clutches of Filipino terror and enslavement.

Moro rebel leaders are still debating until today as to who really founded the genuine revolutionary organization. Leaders from what is now the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that broke away from the MNLF are not yet settled on this issue.<sup>101</sup> But it would be sufficient for us to state here that the original founders of the MNLF included Misuari (Sulu) as the acknowledged Chairman, Abul Alonto (Lanao) as Vice Chairman, and Hashim Salamat as “head of the



undivided Empire Province of Cotabato where a provincial committee was immediately set up.<sup>102</sup>

According to an MNLF document,<sup>103</sup> it was the leaders of the MIM who recruited young Muslims in Manila and other parts of Mindanao to be sent on military training abroad. The recruitment produced 90 young Muslims who began training in Pulao Pangkor, Malaysia in 1969. This group became known as the Top 90 of the MNLF composed of 67 Maranaos, 8 Maguindanaos and 15 Tausug-Samal. Misuari and Alonto were in this group. Hashim Salamat joined the second group of trainees known as "Batch 300" who also trained in Malaysia in 1972.

In 1971, after the "Top 90" completed their training, Misuari, called for a meeting of other Muslim leaders in Zamboanga City. The meeting discussed the situation of the Muslims in the Philippines vis-à-vis their problems with Philippine society and government and the status of the MIM. The result of the meeting was the formation of the MNLF and the election of Misuari as its Chairman. The leaders present also pledged before the Holy Qur'an to engage in Jihad for *Hulah, Bangsa and Agama* (Homeland, Moro Nation and Islam) for all the Bangsamoro people and for the Independence of MinSuluPala (an acronym to denote Mindanao, Sulu, Palawan inclusive of Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and all other islands).

There was no decision yet as to what method to take: parliamentary (constitutional means) or the violent armed struggle. Misuari even participated in the 1971 Constitutional Convention Election for the province of Sulu but lost to well entrenched, traditional Sulu leaders.

*The Response of the Marcos Government.* On September 21, 1972, President Marcos declared Martial Law throughout the country. A nationwide clampdown on all opposition to the Marcos rule was put into action. On October 21 (exactly one month after), the so-called "Marawi Uprising" erupted. The center of action was Marawi City. Some leaders of the uprising were members of the MNLF but the rebels claimed to represent the "Mindanao Revolutionary Council for Independence."<sup>104</sup> Other reports indicated that it was the IKHLAS, a religious organization in Lanao that led the uprising.<sup>105</sup> But whatever organization they carried, the fact remains that the rebels were Muslims and their actions were reflective of the Muslim

initial reactions to the martial rule imposed by President Marcos.

A few weeks later, on November 14, 1972, the MNLF in Sulu engaged the AFP in bloody encounters. In February 1973, widespread fighting also erupted in Cotabato Province. "More than three-fourths of the province had been overrun by the MNLF and were now under their control and influence."<sup>106</sup> The fighting also spread to the provinces of Davao, Zamboanga, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Lanao. The bigger part of Mindanao was almost engulfed in the fighting. "The separatists movement had attained such strength that the integrity of Mindanao as part of the territory of the Philippines came under serious threat."<sup>107</sup>

*The Battle for Jolo.* The high point in this phase of the war came in the battle and subsequent burning of the town of Jolo in February 1974. Casualties were high on both the MNLF and AFP. The MNLF claimed to have "killed 120 soldiers in one area in the town; gunned down two helicopters, one Spotter plane and one U-47 plane."<sup>108</sup> But the ones who suffered the most were civilians. Over a thousand of them died and several thousands were rendered homeless. "The town center...was turned overnight into a heap of cinder, with predictable costs in shape of the dead and homeless."<sup>109</sup> A Philippine weekly paper reported in 1986 thus:

The razing of Jolo, it now appears, was the worst single atrocity to be recorded in 16 years of the Mindanao conflict.

A little over a dozen years ago, the main town of the Tausugs, Jolo, was burned to the ground during a fierce battle between the Philippine government troops and the Muslim freedom fighters of the MNLF. The death count surpassed the 1,000 mark but these are definitive figures.

Only sketchy reports appeared in the papers and even then these were mostly the embellished side of the government. Filipinos (and Moros) elsewhere knew there was heavy fighting in the South that time. Although dead soldiers tell no tales, the mere fact of their deaths provided people an inkling of what the war in Mindanao was like: the government casualty list included soldiers from almost all parts of the country. Then there were the stories of refugees, Muslims and Christians, who migrated to more peaceful places: theirs were harrowing and heart-rending tales. And there were also stories from soldiers who were in the thick of the Mindanao campaign: theirs were voices mostly drunken but sometimes tinged with regret.

This is one story that the Marcos government tried so hard to suppress — and they almost succeeded.<sup>110</sup>

The MNLF leaders then finally decided to declare their intention to set-up the Bangsamoro Republic on March 18, 1974. But the war continued and claimed many more lives from both sides. By the end of 1975, the war had simply produced a stalemate.<sup>111</sup>

The Participation of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in the GRP-MNLF Peace Negotiations

The OIC was organized as a result of the decision made by Kings, Heads of States and Government of Muslim countries during the Islamic Summit held in Rabat, Morocco in 1969.<sup>112</sup>

*Initial OIC Interest in the Bangsamoro.* It started to get involved in the resolution of the Mindanao Conflict in early March 1972 when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference (ICFM) held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, issued Resolution No. 12 which expressed ‘serious concern for the plight of the Muslims living in the Philippines’ and sought the ‘good offices’ of the Philippine Government ‘to guarantee the safety and property of the Muslims in the Philippines’<sup>113</sup>.

The OIC Resolution did not say anything yet about the MNLF. Incidentally, the Secretary General then of the OIC was the late Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdurahman who threatened “trouble between the two countries”<sup>114</sup> at the height of the Philippine-Malaysia dispute on Sabah ignited by the Jabitah Massacre of March 1968.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held in Benghazi, Libya, in March 1973 issued a resolution which created the Quadripartite Ministerial Committee on the Situation of Muslims in the Philippines composed of Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, and Libya as its Chair. It is included in the list of OIC Special Committees, which includes The Six-Member Committee on Palestine.

The role of the Quadripartite Ministerial Committee (QMC) was “to guarantee the security of the Muslim community in the Philippines, as well as to secure the respect for their basic rights.”<sup>115</sup> Even at this early stage, the OIC, in the same Resolution, expressed awareness “of the fact that the problem is full of complications, the more so as it concerns the internal affairs of the independent sovereign

state” and appealed to the Philippine Government to “ensure their safety and basic liberties guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human rights and their country’s constitution.”<sup>116</sup> The Committee visited Manila in August 1973 and was met in Malacanang by no less than President Marcos.<sup>117</sup>

The following year (1974), the OIC took official notice of the MNLF and urged the Philippine Government to resolve the conflict through a negotiated political settlement but within the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippines. ICFM Resolution No. 18 issued on June 25, 1974 right after the 5<sup>th</sup> ICFM, recognized the “complexity of the problem as it relates to an independent and sovereign state”; took note “of the steps taken by the Philippine Government to improve the conditions of the Muslims” and urged “*the Philippine Government to find a political and peaceful solution through negotiation with Muslim leaders, particularly with representatives of the MNLF in order to arrive at a just solution to the plight of the Filipino Muslims within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines*”; and recognized “the problem as an internal problem with the Philippine Government to ensure the safety of the Filipino Muslims and the preservation of their liberties in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>118</sup>

Speaking before the 6<sup>th</sup> ICFM in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Chairman Misuari said that the Kuala Lumpur OIC Resolution paved the way for “a negotiation between the representatives of the MNLF and the Philippine Government under the auspices of the OIC Secretariat in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from 18 to 29 January 1975. But “the negotiation was a failure...it only brought more bitterness and set off the two parties back on their collision course.”<sup>119</sup> Again the 6<sup>th</sup> ICFM issued Resolution No. 10 which invited the Philippine Government “to achieve agreement on all aspects of autonomy for the Muslims in the South of the Philippines.”<sup>120</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Istanbul, Turkey (May 1976) issued Resolution No. 12 which called on the “government of the Philippines to honor its commitment to grant autonomy to the Muslims in Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu and Palawan.”<sup>121</sup>

The following month (August 1976), no less than the OIC Secretary General, His Excellency, Amadou Karim Gaye, came to

Manila with the members of the QMC and even proceeded to Zamboanga City for a meeting with President Marcos at the Southern Command Headquarters. Another meeting in Malacanang hosted by President Marcos for the same delegation also followed.<sup>122</sup>

*The 1976 Tripoli Agreement.* The involvement and participation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference that resulted in a series of diplomatic activities led to the negotiations between the MNLF and the Philippine Government under the auspices of the OIC in Tripoli, Libya in December 1976, which brought about the signing of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. It was followed by the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement between the MNLF and the Government on January 20, 1977 in Zamboanga City in the presence of OIC-QMC Representatives.

To reinforce the results of this negotiation, President Marcos sent First Lady Imelda Marcos for a meeting with the Leader of Libya, Col. Muammar Al-Kaddafi, for the second time (the first one was in November 1976). In April, exchange of cable messages between the two Heads of State (Qadhafy and Marcos) took place.<sup>123</sup> At the same time, the MNLF and Philippine panels were meeting in Manila with the participation of the OIC Representatives following the provisions of the Tripoli Agreement while a series of meetings were also held between President Marcos and the OIC Secretary General in Malacanang.<sup>124</sup>

*The Marcos Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement.* Having done all of these, President Marcos proceeded to implement what he believed was the correct implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. On March 25, 1977, he issued Presidential Proclamation No. 1628 "Declaring Autonomy in southern Philippines".<sup>125</sup>

A plebiscite was held in the 13 Provinces (covered by the Tripoli Agreement) on April 17, 1977. Marcos accordingly based his decision to hold the plebiscite on his understanding with President Khaddafy (as earlier mentioned) that the people were to be asked to organize themselves administratively within the areas of autonomy through a referendum plebiscite. There were 10 questions asked as approved by the Batasan Pambansa (National Assembly) and only Question No. 10 garnered an overwhelming number of Yes votes creating *two autonomous regions*, namely:

**Region IX**

Sulu

Tawi-Tawi

Basilan

Zamboanga del Sur

Zamboanga del Norte

**Region XII**

Maguindanao

North Cotabato

Sultan Kudarat

Lanao del Sur

Lanao del Norte

The cities of Zamboanga, Dipolog and Dapitan were included in Region IX and Cotabato, Marawi and Iligan in Region XII.

With the results of the plebiscite on hand, the Batasang Pambansa (Philippine National Assembly, as the Martial Law Government of Marcos functioned as a Parliamentary System) issued Batas Pambansa Blg. 20 in its First Regular Session "Providing for the Organization of the Sangguniang Pampook (Regional Legislative Assembly) in Each of Regions Nine and Twelve."<sup>126</sup> To implement the said law, Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 1618 ordering the creation of Autonomous Regions IX and XII.<sup>127</sup>

Regional elections were held in 1979. Muslim leaders including former MNLF commanders who "surrendered" to the government were elected and appointed to several key positions in the Regional Governments. In Region XII, Maguindanao and Maranao leaders were elected including some Christian leaders where Christians predominate. In Region IX, Tausug, Yakan and Samal leaders were also likewise elected as well as Christian leaders particularly in the pre-dominantly Christian provinces of Zamboanga.

In effect, the dual set-up provided equal opportunities for the three major tribes (Tausug, Maguindanao and Maranao) to be accommodated in their respective regions.

*The MNLF and the OIC Rejection of the "Marcos Autonomy."* Expectedly, the MNLF rejected the Marcos 'unilateral' implementation of the Tripoli Agreement and so did the OIC. To them it was a violation of the 'letter and spirit' of the Agreement because it divided the Muslims. The Agreement called for one region of autonomy and not two regions. The MNLF leadership then wanted to preserve what they believed was the unity of the Muslim leadership.

Then, "following the 1977 fiasco, the MNLF was accepted in Tripoli, Libya during the 8<sup>th</sup> ICFM, as an observer. And after the

persistent refusal of the Philippine government to comply with the OIC's repeated calls for peace talks and for full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF status was enhanced from a mere 'legitimate representative' to that of a 'sole legitimate representative' of the Bangsamoro people. This occurred in Sana'a, the capital of the Republic of Yemen, on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> ICFM in 1984."<sup>128</sup>

The 1977 Peace Talks finally collapsed following the fatal ambush of Brig. Gen. Bautista and over 30 of his men in Sulu. "The Marcos government used this incident to repudiate the ceasefire altogether and announced the resumption of full-scale war as air, naval, and ground units of the AFP launched three major assaults against the MNLF near Zamboanga City."<sup>129</sup>

## Peace Betrayed

*The Costs of the War.* The economic cost of the war was staggering. Then Deputy Minister for Defense Carmelo Barbero<sup>130</sup> revealed in an interview with a Mindanao Weekly that the government was spending about P15 million a day.<sup>131</sup> A political analyst quoting reports from a US based reporter said that in 1979, "the Marcos regime was spending \$137,000 a day on the war in Mindanao."<sup>132</sup> Recently, a retired General and now Congressman Eduardo Ermita, revealed in a privilege speech in Congress that "the AFP has spent about P73 billion in connection with the Mindanao conflict since 1970: or an average of 40 % of its annual budget. This represents a gargantuan amount. Presently, this would constitute about 30% of the budget of the Philippine Air Force, 40% of the Navy budget, and 60 percent of the Army budget."<sup>133</sup>

In terms of human lives lost, the Government, said Barbero, played with 5,000 lives a day in military operations.<sup>134</sup> Again Congressman Ermita revealed, "Available data from the Armed Forces of the Philippines indicate that for a period of 26 years since 1970, more than 120,000 persons were killed in the conflict in Southern Philippines."<sup>135</sup>

The MNLF had its own accounting of the war. As of 1980, 90,000 Muslims killed; 250,000 houses and thousands of mosques and madrasahs (Islamic schools) burned; 130,000 became refugees in the East Malaysian State of Sabah.<sup>136</sup>

*Split in the MNLF Leadership.* The unity that the MNLF leaders wanted to preserve was put asunder by some MNLF leaders themselves who succumbed to the manipulations of outside forces. Salamat Hashim who was then Vice-Chairman attempted to take over the chairmanship of the MNLF from Misuari in September 1977. An official from what would be the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) narrates the MILF account of this incident in a book as follows:

In the early years of the struggle, Nur Misuari and Salamat Hashim were one and worked together as closely as possible. They were comfortable with each other. Hashim even helped Misuari got the top post of the MNLF. But as the struggle hardened and prolonged – often made more serious by human error – the rift between the two leaders started to surface. Hashim started to be left out of many major sessions of the Central Committee. Soon they began to disagree on almost every major point and finally even on the political ideological issues. Secular-educated, Misuari was nationalistic and Hashim, Islamic oriented, was Islamic. The breaking point came on September 21, 1977, right after the collapses of the GRP-MNLF talks in Manila, when 57 leading officers of the Kutawato Revolutionary Committee (KRC) signed a petition addressed to the OIC and the Muslim World League (MWL) calling for the ouster of the Nur Misuari as Chairman of the MNLF and in his stead, recognizing Salamat Hashim as the new Chair. (The names of some of the signatories followed). In December 1977, several follow-up petitions were forwarded to the OIC and the MWL from Cotabato, Lanao, Zamboanga del Sur, Davao and other areas. Consequently, on December 26, 1977, Salamat Hashim acquiescing to the popular clamor of the leaders in the field, executed the ‘Instrument of Takeover. In his letter to the OIC Sec. Gen. Dr. Ahmadou Karim Gaye, Hashim enumerated the reasons for the takeover.... As expected, Nur Misuari did not only refuse to recognize the takeover but also accused Salamat Hashim of ‘treachery’, ‘incompetence and insubordination. He was also stripped of all his MNLF posts and declared *persona non grata*.<sup>137</sup>

This MILF official acknowledges the varied reactions to this failed take-over. “But, in the end,” he writes, as if expecting a vindication of Salamat’s action in the immediate future, “the final arbiter will always be history – and this moment is forthcoming.”

There is also the account narrated by Atty. Zackaria Candao in an interview in 1987<sup>138</sup>. During this interview, he was the designated Chairman of the Lupong Tagapagpaganap ng Pook (LTP) of Region XII (earlier created by Marcos).



Atty. Candao revealed that he was invited by Misuari to Tripoli in 1976 to serve as MNLF Legal Counsel. He was there when the split took place. He joined Salamat in Cairo, Egypt, when the latter 'invited him' and stayed there in 1979 where he participated in 'discreet talks with the Marcos government without the blessings of the OIC.' But the talks collapsed.

He claimed to have 'partly' known the reasons for the split between Misuari and Salamat. He revealed that when the GRP-MNLF Talks collapsed in April 1977, MNLF commanders in Cotabato headed by Hadji Murad including those from Region IX signed a petition to oust Misuari as MNLF Chairman on the following grounds:

- Misuari has dictatorial tendencies. He never called the MNLF Central Committee to a meeting... all the decisions of Misuari were his personal decisions...not the collective decisions of the MNLF leaders both in the homeland and abroad
- Misuari mismanaged the funds of the MNLF coming from Libya and other sympathetic benefactors among the Muslim countries, huge sums...to be spent in the purchase of arms and to be distributed among the field commanders
- The Moro struggle is Jihad. It is a holy war. Misuari is deviating from Jihad and is leaning to the left... he aligned himself with the Communist. Communism and the struggle of the Moros are never compatible.

There is no available written account from the MNLF of Chairman Misuari on this incident except the January-February 1978 issue of the *Mahardika* (Official Organ of the MNLF) cited in an article by Aijas Ahmad, a Political Analyst and Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University, New York, Prof.<sup>139</sup>

Ahmad's account of the leadership crisis that befell the MNLF is very revealing. He notes that the attempt of Salamat to take over the chairmanship of the MNLF from Misuari took place at the time when the "(a) AFP resumed its offensives (against the MNLF) and (b) the creation of the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO) was announced."<sup>140</sup> Ahmad admits to possess no "incontrovertible evidence" to support his claim, but he says that "it appears reasonable to surmise that, behind the smokescreen of the Tripoli Agreement,

elements in the Manila regime had opened two simultaneous dialogues.”<sup>141</sup>

That is, the first dialogue involved the Marcos government approaching “the traditional Moro elite outside the MNLF and the more conservative tendency inside it... who were both unhappy about the new leadership (under Misuari)” which was “radicalizing mass consciousness among the Moros.”<sup>142</sup>

“The second dialogue... ran clearly through the United States and, reached the Saudi-Egyptian network that was already unhappy with the MNLF’s Libyan connection.” The program was designed, according to Ahmad “(a) to reconstitute the MNLF under its more conservative wing led by the Salamat faction; (b) to have this MNLF recognized BMLO as the umbrella organization for Moro politics; then (c) to get Islamic Conference put its seal of approval of the Salamat-Pendatun apparatus and then (d) to resume the negotiations in order to produce an agreement on the autonomy acceptable to the Marcos regime.”<sup>143</sup>

As noted earlier, Marcos implemented his own version of autonomy. He created the “Provisional Government... which opened positions of some power and influences for a certain strata among the Muslims (that) was intended to help erode the MNLF’s social base—just in case the creation of BMLO and Salamat’s ‘take-over’ prove insufficient.”<sup>144</sup>

“This period must have been most bleak for the Misuari leadership,” observes Ahmad. Because of all these manipulations which “were so zealously synchronized with the expanding military offensives of the AFP... it was unclear for most close and sympathetic observers whether or not the MNLF, as an organization, would even survive. It is a tribute to the mass base and the tenacity of its leadership that it survived.”<sup>145</sup>

*The Aquino Government Policies.* In 1986, the Aquino Government, aware of the positions taken by the MNLF and the Bangsamoro people against the Marcos formula, attempted to merge the two Regions into *one autonomous region*, by the issuance of an Executive Order. Then LTP Region XII Chairman Zackaria Candao was designated as Chairman of the merged Regional Executive Councils with Zamboanga City as the Capital.

Leaders of Region IX opposed the appointment of Candao.<sup>146</sup> The plan however did not push through as it was followed immediately by the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks that initially produced the Agreement for the Cessation of Hostilities on September 5, 1986. Another document was signed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in January 1987 between the GRP and MNLF Panels and witnessed by the OIC Secretary General containing an agreement to discuss the grant of autonomy to the whole of Mindanao covering 23 Provinces.

The Talks however were overtaken by the approval of the 1987 Constitution, which provided for the creation of autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao through an act of Congress and to be effective only upon approval by the people in a plebiscite. The GRP-MNLF Talks collapsed in May 1987.

It should also be mentioned here that there were attempts to open negotiations with the MILF. But despite the recommendations of certain leaders of the Aquino Government, the negotiations did not materialize.<sup>147</sup>

The Aquino Administration then proceeded with its own formula to resolve the Mindanao conflict that among others resulted in the drafting of the Organic Act for ARMM. With the passage by Congress of Republic Act No. 6734, plebiscite was conducted in the 10 Provinces covered by Autonomous Regions IX and XII on October 19, 1989. Only 4 Provinces, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao voted Yes. The town of Jolo registered a NO Vote but was carried by the Yes Vote of the Province of Sulu. The Cities of Cotabato and Marawi objected and were not included in the Provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao. The Muslim-dominated Province of Basilan opted for a NO vote.

The first set of elected officials of the ARMM (1990-1993) was headed by Zackaria Candao as Regional Governor with Benjamin Loong (Sulu) as Vice Governor. Not surprisingly, according to a confidential document,<sup>148</sup> some members of Candao's Regional Cabinet were known MILF officials and supporters.

The MNLF then consistently refused to recognize the ARMM as the correct implementation of autonomy contemplated in the Tripoli Agreement. But the cessation of hostilities agreement they signed with the Aquino Government in 1986 continued to hold as no major military encounters between them and the AFP took place

during the period up to the assumption of new set of Philippine national officials in June 1992.

### **MNLF Gains in the Diplomatic Front**

As the MNLF suffered setbacks in the home front and within their ranks, they were however gaining success in their diplomatic campaigns in the Muslim World. Below is a summary of key diplomatic events concerning the MNLF vis-à-vis its relations with the international Islamic community starting in the 1970s.

It was in the 8<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Tripoli, Libya in May 1977 that the MNLF Chairman was allowed for the first time to address the Conference.<sup>149</sup> It was also during this OIC Assembly that the MNLF was granted observer status by the OIC on an exceptional basis<sup>150</sup> as a result of the collapse of the Tripoli negotiations.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> ICFM that followed in Dakar, Republic of Senegal in April 1978, the OIC decided to consider the MNLF, signatory to the Tripoli Agreement, the legitimate representative of Muslims in Southern Philippines.<sup>151</sup>

In the 10<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Fez, Morocco in May 1979, the OIC threatened to bring the Bangsamoro problem to the international community if the Philippine government were to continue to evade its treaty responsibilities.”<sup>152</sup>

The 11<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Islamabad, Pakistan from May 17 to 22 in 1980 “vigorously reaffirmed the OIC’s support for the struggle of the Bangsamoro people under the MNLF leadership with a view to achieving self-determination.”<sup>153</sup>

In the 15<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Sana’a, Yemen from 18-22 December 1984, the MNLF status was enhanced from a mere “legitimate representative” to that of a “sole legitimate representative” of the Bangsamoro people.”<sup>154</sup>

During the Fifth OIC Summit held in Kuwait, State of Kuwait, 26-29 January 1987, the MNLF Chairman participated in the signing of the so-called Jeddah Accord between the MNLF and the Philippine Government, calling for the granting of full autonomy to the entire Bangsamoro Homeland of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan.”<sup>155</sup>

The 17<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Amman, Kingdom of Jordan adopted the

following resolutions, emphasizing that it:

1. Expresses deep regret over the failure of the Government of the Republic of the Philippine to honor its commitment to implement the Tripoli agreement of 1976.
2. Affirms that the so-called steps taken by the Government of the Republic of the Philippines including the formation of the so-called Consultative Council are in no way in conformity with the provisions of the Tripoli Agreement, which clearly provides for the establishment of autonomy to the thirteen provinces, specified therein, and which constitute a binding international agreement.
3. Condemns all forms of repression inflicted upon the Bangsamoro people and the denial of their fundamental rights.
4. Calls upon the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to honor the commitment of the Tripoli Agreement made to the MNLF and the OIC representing the collective will of the Muslim Nations.

The 18<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 13-16 March 1989 *“gave blanket authority to the Quadripartite Ministerial Committee and the OIC Secretary General to adopt any measures they may deem fit to solve the Bangsamoro problem should the Philippine government continue in defying the OIC calls for peace talks and full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement.”*<sup>156</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Cairo, Egypt, 31 July to 5 August, 1990 decided *“to enlarge the Ministerial Committee, set up in accordance with the relevant resolution of the Fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, so as to include, in addition to its original members, members of some Asian States.”*<sup>157</sup>

The Secretary General of the OIC even declared that “after the objective exposition of developments since the 18<sup>th</sup> ICFM, I would like to inform Your Royal Highness and Your Excellencies that the unilateral actions taken by the Philippine Government does not conform to the Tripoli Agreement. These actions have led to a deadlock which jeopardizes the peace in Southern Philippines.”<sup>158</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Istanbul, Turkey from 4 to 8 August 1991 *“Urges the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to continue*

to fully implement the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 in letter and spirit and pursue its efforts to grant the Southern Philippines autonomy as agreed with the Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of Islamic Conference.”<sup>159</sup>

Following this OIC Resolution, the “OIC Secretary General sent a delegation to the Republic of the Philippines in late 1991. The delegation held positive and constructive talks with officials in the Philippines and submitted the results of these talks to the Sixth Islamic Summit held in Dakar, Senegal in 1991.”<sup>160</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> ICFM held in Karachi, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, from 25 to 29 April 1993 the MNLF Chairman reported about the results of the exploratory talks with the Philippine government as he suggested to the “Assembly to exert maximum moral and political pressures on the Philippine government on an individual and collective basis.”<sup>161</sup> As a result, the OIC “issued a resolution commending the leadership of the MNLF for their consistency in being ready to act for the settlement of the problem of Muslims in Southern Philippines peacefully, through negotiation. The Conference also welcomed the Two Memoranda of Understanding with which the concerned parties crowned their preliminary talks held in Tripoli, Libya and Cipanas, Indonesia. The Conference also called upon the concerned parties to initiate their formal talks, on dates agreed upon in the preliminary talks, with a view to achieving an equitable, comprehensive and final solution to the problem.”<sup>162</sup>

The 22<sup>nd</sup> ICFM held in Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco from 10 to 11 December 1994, adopted a resolution which “welcomes the readiness of the Philippine Government to enhance the confidence-building process between the Philippine Government, Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of Islamic Conference; and also welcomes its resolve to maintain the momentum generated by goodwill for participating in a wide ranging process to seek creative solutions to the key issues so as to ensure the success of the Third Round of Formal Peace Negotiations particularly which the Conference hopes to be the final one and the success of the peace process in South Philippines in general.”<sup>163</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit requested the Secretary General and the Ministerial Committee to continue their efforts with all parties concerned for the achievement of a peaceful, just, comprehensive and

final solution to the Bangsamoro problem in southern Philippines within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines.”<sup>164</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit of Heads of States, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, 13-14 December 1994 “welcomed the agreement between the participants in the official peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), with the participation of the Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General to make the subject of the talks focusing on the necessary means to fully implement the 1976 Tripoli agreement, in letter and spirit...”<sup>165</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Istanbul, Turkey from 4 to 8 August 1991 urged “the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to continue to fully implement the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 in letter and spirit and pursue its efforts to grant the Southern Philippines autonomy as agreed with the Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of Islamic Conference.”<sup>166</sup>

Following this OIC Resolution, the “OIC Secretary General sent a delegation to the Republic of the Philippines in late 1991. The delegation held positive and constructive talks with officials in the Philippines and submitted the results of these talks to the Sixth Islamic Summit held in Dakar, Senegal in 1991.”<sup>167</sup>

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## Endnotes, Chapter 1

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<sup>1</sup> O.D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation.*, Vol. I, p. 46. Quezon City: AKLAHI Foundation, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Cesar A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines.* Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Cesar A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines: Past, Present, and Future Prospects* Manila: CISP, Inc., 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Cesar a. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines.* Quezon City. University of the Philippines, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cesar Majul, "Islam in the Philippines," *Philippine Free Press*, May 1, 1965, p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> Najeeb Saleeby, *The History of Sulu*. Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild Inc., 1963, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel K. Tan, *Decolonization and Filipino Muslim Identity*. Quezon City: Department of History, UP Diliman, 1989, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*., Vol. I, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary*. Lahore, Pakistan: 1934, Note 143.

<sup>15</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary* (State of Qatar: Presidency of Islamic Courts and Affairs, originally published in 1934). In Note 56, the Author said "God speaks of Himself usually in the first person "We": it is the plural of respect and honor and is used in human language in Royal proclamations and decrees. But where a special personal relationship is expressed, the singular "I" or "Me" is used.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899-1920*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, Vol. I, pp. 46-47.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> F. Landa Jocano, "The Vision of the Future Must Be Rooted in our Image of the Past," *Sunburst*, June 1977, pp. 28-32; 91-92. Presented in revised form in *Selected Readings: Socio-Cultural Dimension of National Security (NSA 201)* for MNSA Regular Classes 34 & 35, NDCP, 1999-2000, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots...* pp. 135-136.

<sup>25</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots...*

<sup>26</sup> Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...*p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...*p. 12 from Cesar A. Majul, "The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People," *Asian Studies* 4.2 (August), pp. 303-315

<sup>28</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland...* p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...*p.32 from Cesar A. Majul, "The Muslims in the Philippine: An Historical Perspective," " in Gowing & McAmis (eds.), *The Muslim Filipinos*. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press for the Asian Center, 1973.



- <sup>31</sup> Quoted in Luis Camara Dery. *The Kris in Philippine History: A Study of the Impact of Moro-Anti-Colonial Resistance, 1571-1896* (1997, p. 9) from F. Dolor Angeles, "Brunei and the Moro Wars," *The Brunei Museum Journa*. 1.1 (1969): 119.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> See Annex X for the meaning of *Jihad*.
- <sup>34</sup> Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines: Past, Present and Future Prospects...* p. 7.
- <sup>35</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots...* Vol. I, p. xi.
- <sup>36</sup> Saleeby, *The History of Sulu*, Filipiniana Book Guild Inc., 1963.
- <sup>37</sup> Majul, "Political and Historical Notes on the Old Sultanate: Report of the University of the Philippines Committee on the Study of the Philippine Claim to the North Borneo Territory," p. 50.
- <sup>38</sup> Tregonning, K.G., *Under Chartered Company Rule*. (University of Malaya Press, 1958). p. 14
- <sup>39</sup> *Philippine Claim to North Borneo (Sabah), Volume II*. Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1967.
- <sup>40</sup> Saleeby, *The History of Sulu*. Filipiniana Book Guild Inc, 1963.
- <sup>41</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation...* pp. xii-xiii.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, p. 329.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp. 329-330.
- <sup>46</sup> Quoted in O. D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, Vol. II, p. 330, from John R.M. Taylor, comp. *The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States: A Compilation of Documents with Notes and Introduction*. Pasay City, Philippines: Eugenio Lopez Foundation, 1971.
- <sup>47</sup> O. D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, Vol. II, p.330.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp. 331-332.
- <sup>49</sup> Quoted in Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland...* p. 10 from Cf. Garel A. Grunder and William B. Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951, pp. 138-139).
- <sup>50</sup> Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...* p. 34.
- <sup>51</sup> Vic Hurley, *Swish of the Kris: The Story of the Moros*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1936. Reprinted in Filipiniana Reprint Series, Ed. Renato Constantino, 1985, pp. 174-175.
- <sup>52</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation...* p. 507.
- <sup>53</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland ...* p. 14.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 26.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 36.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 76 from Division of the Philippines, 1903, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation...* p. 512.

<sup>62</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland...* p. 86.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 154.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp. 156-159.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>69</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation...* Vol. II p. 514.

<sup>70</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland...* pp. 160-161.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 162.

<sup>72</sup> Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation...* p. 515.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 238-241.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 242.

<sup>76</sup> Hurley, *Swish of the Kris....* p. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...* p. 37.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

<sup>79</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland...* p. 255.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Asani, "Moros Not Filipinos"... from US Congressional Records.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

<sup>83</sup> Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland...* p. 328, quoting a passage from the letter of Arolas Tulawie of Sulu addressed to General Pershing in 1923.

<sup>84</sup> Tan, *The Filipino Muslim Armed Struggle, 1900-1972...* p. 113.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 188.

<sup>86</sup> Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...* p. 189.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Tage U.H. Ellinger, *Friend of the Brave*. Manila: Manlapaz Publishing Company, 1954, p. 139.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. pp. 139-141.

- <sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 146.
- <sup>91</sup> Alunan Glang, who was then part of the Moro intellectuals, wrote a book, *Muslim Secession or Integration?*
- <sup>92</sup> Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...* p. 191.
- <sup>93</sup> Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos...* p. 193.
- <sup>94</sup> Macapado Muslim, *The Moro Armed Struggle in the Philippines: The Nonviolent Autonomy Alternative*. Marawi City: Mindanao State University, 1994, p. 94.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>97</sup> Glang, *Secession or Integration...* p. 103.
- <sup>98</sup> Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under ...* p. 135.
- <sup>99</sup> Nur Misuari, "The Rise and Fall of Moro Statehood," in *Philippine Development Forum* 6.2 (1992), edited by Prof. Rolando Talampas, et. al.
- <sup>100</sup> Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under Endless Tyranny...* p.150 with explanations on p. 282 Note 5.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup> Khalid Al-Walid, "Pag-Jihad sin Bangsamoro Ha Babaan sin MNLF" (Bangsamoro Jihad Under the Leadership of the MNLF). Unpublished Document from the MNLF Files.
- <sup>103</sup> Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro....* p. 158
- <sup>104</sup> Khalid Al Walid, "Pag-Jihad Sin Bangsamoro... p. 20.
- <sup>105</sup> Fortunato Abat, *The Day We Nearly Lost Mindanao: The CEMCOM Story*. San Juan, Metro Manila: F. U. Abat, 1993, p. 13.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>107</sup> Cited in the speech of Nur Misuari, Chairman, MNLF, "The Rise and Fall of Moro Statehood" in *Philippine Development Forum* 6.2 (1992), edited by Prof. Rolando Simbulan (Manila: University of the Philippines, 1992).
- <sup>108</sup> Aijas Ahmad, "Class and Colony in Mindanao," in *Southeast Asian Chronicle*, 1982.
- <sup>109</sup> Philippine Dispatch. Third Week, April 1986.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>111</sup> *Handbook of the Organization of the Islamic Conference*, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 7 February 1990.
- <sup>112</sup> Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), 3<sup>rd</sup> Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference (ICFM), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 29 February to 4 March 1972. "Resolution No. 12: Resolution on the Situation of Moslems in the Philippines."Also quoted in Soliman M. Santos, Jr., "The Philippine-Muslim Dispute: International Aspects from Origin to Resolution, The Role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in the Peace Negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)."
- <sup>113</sup> Arnold M. Azurin, *Beyond the Cult of Dissidence in Southern Philippines and Wartorn Zones in the Global Village*. UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies and University

of the Philippines Press, 1996, p. 86.

<sup>114</sup> *Handbook of the OIC...*

<sup>115</sup> Quoted in "Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement" jointly published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Muslim Affairs, Manila, 27 November 1984, p. 36.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> From MNLF Files, ICFM Resolution No. 18 issued by the 5<sup>th</sup> ICFM, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 25 June 1974. Also quoted in "Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement."

<sup>118</sup> From MNLF files, Nur Misuari, Chairman, MNLF "Appeal to the Islamic World for Support of the Moro People in Southern Philippines," speech delivered before the 6<sup>th</sup> ICFM, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1975.

<sup>119</sup> From MNLF files, Resolution No. 10, 6<sup>th</sup> ICFM, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1975. Also quoted in "Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement."

<sup>120</sup> From MNLF files, Resolution No. 12, 7<sup>th</sup> ICFM, Istanbul, Turkey, May 1976. Also quoted in "Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement."

<sup>121</sup> "Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement."

<sup>122</sup> The Marcos-Qadhafy Accord, agreements between President Marcos and Col. Qadhafy to accelerate the process of implementing the Tripoli Agreement, April 1977.

<sup>123</sup> "Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement," p. 37.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, Annex II, p. 52.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, Annex VII, p. 56.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, Annex VIII, p. 58.

<sup>127</sup> From MNLF files, Nur Misuari, Chairman, MNLF, Address delivered before the Plenary Session of the 19<sup>th</sup> ICFM, held in Cairo, Egypt, 31-July to 5 August 1990, "The Tragedy of the Peace Process and What the 19<sup>th</sup> ICFM Can Do to Help."

<sup>128</sup> Aijas Ahmad, "Class and Colony in Mindanao," in *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, No. 82, February 1982.

<sup>129</sup> Hon. Carmelo Barbero was the country's Deputy Minister of Defense at the height of the Mindanao war in the early 1970s. He represented the Government Panel in the Negotiations with the MNLF that led to the signing of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement.

<sup>130</sup> *The Mindanao Today*, August-September 1978, quoted in Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under Endless Tyranny*. Kuala Lumpur: IQ Marin SDN BHD, 1999, p. 162.

<sup>131</sup> Aijas Ahmad, "Class and Colony in Mindanao," *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, No. 82, February 1982, pp.4-14.

<sup>132</sup> Representative Eduardo R. Ermita, Privilege Speech, House of Representative, April 1996. Also quoted in Salah Jubair's *Bangsamoro: A Nation...*

<sup>133</sup> *The Mindanao Today*, August-September 1978...

<sup>134</sup> Representative Ermita, Privilege Speech, House of Representative, April 1996. Also quoted in Atty. Wenecelito T. Andanar, *The Mindanao Question: Focus on SPCPD*. Unpublished Thesis. NDCP, 1997, p. 98.

<sup>135</sup> MNLF Report, "Philippine Colonial Domination and the Bangsamoro People's Right to

Self-Determination,” submitted to the Permanent People’s Tribunal in Belgium in November 1980 for the MNLF Central Committee by Abdurasad Asani, MNLF Director for Information. MNLF Secretariat Files.

- <sup>136</sup> Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation....* p. 154.
- <sup>137</sup> Margarita R. Cojuangco, *Role of the MILF in the Mindanao Problem*. MNSA Thesis, NDCP, 1988. The interview was conducted on October 21, 1987 and the transcript is included as one of the annexes in this Thesis.
- <sup>138</sup> Ahmad, “Class and Colony...”
- <sup>139</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>140</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>143</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>144</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>145</sup> See also Cojuangco, “Role of the MILF in the Mindanao Problem...” p. 138.
- <sup>146</sup> In her NDCP Thesis, “Role of the MILF in the Mindanao Problem...” Cojuangco strongly recommended the opening of negotiations with the MILF.
- <sup>147</sup> CANDAO FILES marked Confidential. An investigative work by the Concerned Muslim Youths of Mindanao (for sale P15.00 per copy). Attached to the document are reproduction copies of Official Reports of the Commission on Audit (COA) on the ARMM. The document was circulated during the campaign period of the 1993 ARMM Election. (Copy in the possession of the Author).
- <sup>148</sup> Mara Stankovitch, ed., *Compromising on Autonomy: Mindanao in Transition*. London, 1999, p. 78.
- <sup>149</sup> Report of the Secretary General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines to the Twenty-Second Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, December 1994.
- <sup>150</sup> Ibid
- <sup>151</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, speech delivered before the 19<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Cairo, Egypt, August 1990.
- <sup>152</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>153</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Sana’a, Yemen, December 1984.
- <sup>154</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, speech delivered at the 5<sup>th</sup> OIC Islamic Summit held in Kuwait, State of Kuwait, 26-29 January 1987.
- <sup>155</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, speech delivered before the 19<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Cairo, Egypt, August 1990.
- <sup>156</sup> Resolution adopted by the 19<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Cairo, Egypt, 31 July to 5 August, 1990.
- <sup>157</sup> Statements of the OIC Secretary General made during the meeting of the Quadripartite Ministerial Committee held in Cairo Egypt, August 1, 1990.
- <sup>158</sup> Resolution adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Istanbul, Turkey, 4 to 8 August 1991.

- <sup>159</sup> Report of the Secretary General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines to the Twenty-Second Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, December 1994.
- <sup>160</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, speech delivered at the 21<sup>st</sup> ICFM held in Karachi, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 25-29 April 1993.
- <sup>161</sup> Report of the Secretary General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines to the Twenty-Second Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, December 1994.
- <sup>162</sup> Resolution adopted by the 22<sup>nd</sup> ICFM held in Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, from 10 to 11 December 1994.
- <sup>163</sup> Final Communiqué adopted by the 6<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit of Heads of Islamic States held in Dakar, Senegal, 9-12 December 1991. as stated in the report of the Secretary General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines to the 22<sup>nd</sup> ICFM, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, 11-12 December 1994.
- <sup>164</sup> Final Communique of the Seventh Islamic Summit Coinference, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, 13-15 December 1994.
- <sup>165</sup> Resolution adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Istanbul, Turkey, 4 to 8 August 1991.
- <sup>166</sup> Report of the Secretary General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines to the Twenty-Second Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, December 1994.



## **Exploratory Talks: Inclinations Towards Peace**



As guest of H.E. President Fidel  
V. Ramos, and being introduced to  
members of the Media as MNLF  
Spokesman. Malacanang Palace.  
August 22, 1996



*“If the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace and trust in God.”*

—Qur’an, VIII: 61

## The Exploratory Period: September 1992 to September 1993

The MNLF leadership did not expect the newly installed Ramos administration to initiate the resumption of peace talks. In the 1992 national elections, the MNLF had even supported another Presidential candidate who agreed to sign a document for the resumption of talks based on the Tripoli Agreement. The MNLF viewed Ramos at that time as one who was “rabidly inclined towards a military solution” and thought that the election of Ramos “could only mean the resumption of the colonial war and the perpetuation of colonial rule.”<sup>1</sup>

But when President Ramos implemented his peace initiatives, the MNLF as a matter of policy based on the Qur’an, could not refuse the offer of peace. This reaction is consistent with the Qur’anic principle that: *“If the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace and trust in God.”* (VIII: 61)

The policy of the Ramos administration was outlined in the first State-of-the-Nation-Address that the President delivered on July 27, 1992, barely a month after assuming office.<sup>2</sup> His five priority programs included “national stability,” which he explains in terms of “reconciliation and unity underpinned by peace negotiations with the MNLF, the leftist underground and the military rebels.”<sup>3</sup>

**September 1992.** In the early evening of September 15, 1992, I received a telephone call from Congressman Nur Jaafar of Tawi-Tawi. He told me about the plan of the newly installed Ramos government to initiate contacts with the MNLF in order to resume peace negotiations. Congressman Eduardo Ermita of Batangas was given this assignment and Jaafar was a member of the team. Ermita wanted to meet with an MNLF official. Jaafar asked me if I could represent the MNLF. I said yes, but I clarified that I still needed to clear it with the MNLF Chairman.

I called up Chairman Misuari in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia the

following day, September 16, in the morning, and told him about the message from Jaafar. He told me that he had information that representatives from the Government were supposed to come to Tripoli, Libya, but nobody came and he wanted to know why. He was nevertheless still ready to meet them if they came on the following conditions: 1) the Philippine representative should bring authority from President Ramos; 2) the meeting should be held in the presence of OIC representatives; and 3) he should be informed beforehand of the agenda and what the Ramos Government had to offer. The MNLF Chairman advised me to have the meeting with Ermita in the presence of Jaafar.

At this stage, the MNLF leadership still doubted the motives of Ermita and the Ramos government. He reminded me to coordinate with the Libyan Ambassador in Manila because Tripoli had a plan and was aware of this move of the GRP. He advised me to be very careful not to allow anyone to localize the MNLF issue. In the meantime, the Libyan government had assured Misuari of full support in the event of the resumption of negotiations.

In the evening of September 16, I met with Jaafar and Ermita in a private dinner in a Quezon City restaurant. With us also was Dr. Mashur Jundam of the Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Philippines. Ermita was not an unfamiliar government official to the MNLF hierarchy. While a Colonel in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), he had served as a member of the GRP Panel during the GRP-MNLF Peace Negotiations in 1976 in Tripoli, Libya that produced the Tripoli Agreement. The MNLF was aware of his record of having persuaded several MNLF Commanders to “return to the folds of the law” while he was in the AFP’s Office for Civil Relations. He was also known to be very close to Ramos during their time in the AFP and in the Department of National Defense where he served as Undersecretary under Ramos who was its head.

Initially I thought the meeting would just be like other meetings Ermita had in the past with MNLF Commanders—meetings in which his main agenda was to bring the offer of government amnesty to the negotiating table. We did not know each other yet. It was our first time to meet. The meeting, however, turned out to be the beginning of a relationship not only between Ermita and me (which led to my appointment as MNLF Emissary), but also between him

and senior leaders of the MNLF. And it is these relationships that helped shape the progress of the peace talks.

Ermita asked me to relay the message of peace of President Ramos to Misuari and the MNLF leadership. Specifically, Ermita explained that Ramos wanted to resume the talks with the MNLF.

I responded by emphasizing to Ermita the standing policy of the MNLF on four important issues that had to be satisfied before the MNLF could accept the offer: first, the negotiations should be held under the auspices and with the active participation of the OIC; second, the agenda for the talks should be the 1976 Tripoli Agreement; third, the negotiations should be held in a foreign country mutually acceptable to all parties, including the OIC; and fourth, there should be no talk or offer of surrender covered by amnesty from government.

The last point was very important, I emphasized to Congressman Ermita. Lessons had to be learned in the failed 1976-77 GRP-MNLF negotiations. One of the major incidents that led to the total breakdown of the Ceasefire Agreement and eventually the final collapse of that negotiation was the attempt made by some government officials to offer amnesty to MNLF Commanders while the negotiations were going on.<sup>4</sup>

Ermita explained that he wanted to meet with the MNLF Chairman for exploratory talks and that he would bring with him official authority from the President. He also told me of certain groups claiming to be representatives of the MNLF, the MILF and the MNLF-Reformist Group who submitted proposals to President Ramos on how to go about talking peace with the Muslim rebels without the participation of Chairman Misuari. I told Ermita that the MNLF Chairman had not authorized anyone to talk to the Government. Even this very meeting I was having with them was without the knowledge of the MNLF Chairman.

I assured Ermita, however, that the "message of peace" would be relayed to Misuari and that I would inform him of Misuari's response as soon as possible. I believed then that it was a very significant offer, coming from a man who saw battle in Mindanao. Moreover, the MNLF would always welcome the offer of peace, as this was a guiding principle from the Qu'ran adhered to by the organization.

The following day, September 17, I made an overseas call to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and sent the important message by fax. Initially, I thought the MNLF Chairman would not be impressed by the message. Dr. Abdurahman Amin<sup>5</sup> told me over the phone that the MNLF Chairman even speculated on the government's hidden agenda. The MNLF initially thought that Ermita's intention was to try to explore other possibilities of offering government amnesty to the MNLF.

But I personally believed that the Ramos' initiative could be an opportunity to give peace another chance. I expressed these thoughts to Dr. Amin. The MNLF had to make a choice, either to accept the peace initiatives from President Ramos if offered through acceptable channels or to initiate the resumption of hostilities. Too remain in a wait-and-see posture and merely continue the diplomatic campaigns in the OIC and its member countries would just be a repeat of what the MNLF did right after the collapse of the GRP-MNLF Talks in 1987. They had chosen to maintain a "no-war-no-peace" situation. Nobody benefited from it—neither the people nor the government. The present situation, however, was different and represented a golden opportunity. Ramos and Ermita were no longer mere generals in the AFP who had to subordinate themselves to the highest authorities in the national leadership. Ramos was now the President who 'gave the orders' and Ermita was already a lawmaker who 'made the law'.

President Ramos would reveal later that even while still a presidential candidate, he had traveled to Tripoli, Libya, in the company of then Congressman Jose de Venecia, Jr. to consult with the Libyan Leader Col. Muammar Khaddafy.<sup>6</sup> He "came back to the Philippines after three days, bearing Libya's assurance of support for, and assistance to, the peace process."<sup>7</sup>

I was also in contact with the Libyan Ambassador to Manila, His Excellency, Rajab Abdelaziz Azzarouq,<sup>8</sup> who assumed his post in 1991. When I informed the Libyan Ambassador about the meeting with Congressman Ermita, he said that Ermita was also in contact with him and that he had already sent his official report to Tripoli about these positive developments. His Government, the Ambassador assured me, was just too happy to host the meeting between Ermita and the MNLF Chairman. This would give Libya the opportunity to finish what they started in Tripoli 16 years ago when the GRP and

the MNLF with the participation of the OIC Secretary General and then OIC Quadripartite Ministerial Committee headed by Libya signed the 1976 Tripoli Agreement.

### The First Exploratory Talks

The GRP Panel, headed by Ermita as Chairman with Jaafar as Vice-Chairman and Mr. Silvestre Afable Jr. as Technical Assistant, left Manila for the peace mission on September 25<sup>9</sup>. Before their departure, I had met with Jaafar over breakfast and reminded him of the four conditions required by the MNLF for a meeting to push forward, especially the last condition—that they should not open any discussion about offering amnesty to the MNLF. But when they reached Tripoli, they had to call me because they still had no confirmation on whether or not the MNLF Chairman was going to see them. I had to call the MNLF Chairman again who was apparently already crossing the border between Egypt and Libya by land transportation—there was no air traffic to Libya from any country because of the UN sanctions. He sent word that he would proceed to Tripoli. I then called back Ermita in and assured him that the MNLF Delegation was coming.

*Tripoli, Libya.* The MNLF Chairman arrived in Tripoli after three days of travel across the desert. Upon his arrival, a private meeting was arranged between him and his delegation and Congressman Jaafar<sup>10</sup>. The MNLF was still suspicious of Ermita's intentions.<sup>11</sup> Jaafar's presence as Vice Chairman of the 3-Member GRP Delegation contributed very much to the building of confidence between the two panels. That private meeting with the MNLF Chairman, Jaafar told me later on, generated enough confidence on the part of the MNLF to meet with Ermita.

The First Exploratory Talks started on October 3 at the Office of the General Secretariat for International Relations and Cooperation and was presided over by H.E. Ahmad Bin Khayyal, Undersecretary of the People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation.<sup>12</sup>

The MNLF Panel was composed of Chairman Misuari; MNLF Vice Chairman Hatimil Hassan; Foreign Affairs Secretary General Ustadz Abdalbaki Abubakar; Deputy for Foreign Affairs and Director

of MNLF Office in Islamabad, Pakistan, Habib Mujahab Hashim; and MNLF Information Chief Ibrahim Omar.

In his official statement,<sup>13</sup> Congressman Ermita said, “President Ramos is determined to wage peace in Southern Philippines by fighting for the fullest autonomy of our Muslim brethren within the governance of our Constitution...to attain a final solution to the problem that will accord honor to all sides, promote mutual respect...serve the highest interest of the people, especially the poor and powerless.” Aware of the nature of their meeting, he said, “We have not come here to negotiate or to debate,” but “to listen, to understand and explore possibilities.”

The MNLF Chairman responded by reiterating the “commitment of the MNLF to work for peace along the principles of justice, honor and dignity” and “to exhaust all peaceful means to resolve the conflict in the interest of the Bangsamoro people as well as the entire Filipino nation.”<sup>14</sup>

The formal exchange of official statements was followed by a series of informal and, later on, friendly and cordial meetings between the two parties. It served as an opportunity for Misuari and Ermita to know each other very well. The atmosphere became relaxed, and confidence on both sides started to build. It was now possible for them to face the cameras together in a friendly pose—which was something that did not happen even in the 1976 negotiations that led to the Tripoli Agreement. What was established was a friendship and mutual respect for each other.

Ermita had been advised by experts to deal with Misuari in a very deliberate manner in order to disarm and charm him (e.g. appealing to his intellectual background by addressing him as “Professor”). Even the agenda for the talks were categorized so that even those items normally considered “non-negotiable” would not cause the negotiations to collapse but instead be considered for future discussions. Everything was designed to be negotiable.<sup>15</sup>

**October 4.** The parties signed the “Statement of Understanding.”<sup>16</sup> They agreed “to pursue formal talks towards a peaceful, honorable and dignified resolution of the conflict” and Misuari proposed that the formal talks should focus on the “modalities for the full implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement according to its letter and spirit” and that “the talks be held in a neutral venue acceptable

to the two parties under the auspices of the OIC.”<sup>17</sup> These were effectively the same fundamental points that I explained to Ermita during our initial meeting.

The Ermita Panel “agreed to elevate the proposals for the consideration of the highest Philippine Authorities” and promised that a reply was to be made within two weeks upon arrival of the GRP Panel in the Philippines “to be transmitted to Chairman Misuari... through the Libyan Embassy in Manila.”<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Both panels agreed to be “as discreet as possible in regard to media exposure of the exploratory talks and succeeding developments” and that “any statements to the press shall consist of generalities.”<sup>19</sup>

The GRP official response to the Tripoli Statement of Understanding came on time. “Indeed,” reported Misuari, “soon after the end of the countdown, the Congressman communicated to the MNLF Chairman’s office in the Middle East his government’s response, through a previously agreed channel.”<sup>20</sup>

**The National Unification Commission (NUC).** The reply came in the form of a statement from the NUC dated 23 October 1992, which Ermita transmitted through two channels. The first was the “formal” one: the Libyan Embassy in Manila. The second was the informal channel, *which happened to be me*. Ermita and Ambassador Rajab had recognized me as the direct link to the MNLF leadership. I communicated directly with the MNLF Chairman, whereas the Libyan Channel was subject to the usual diplomatic protocol and therefore could be delayed. This was a very important consideration during that period.

The NUC Statement said: “We welcome the continuation of exploratory talks with Mr. Nur Misuari...that the second phase...be held in the Philippines as a tangible and concrete effort towards national unification...we express gratitude to the OIC...we shall welcome OIC representatives to observe the next phase of exploratory talks.”<sup>21</sup>

**.November 1992.** The MNLF Chairman replied to the NUC Statement after meeting with the Secretary General of the OIC and issued an official statement<sup>22</sup> in writing saying that “the MNLF could not accept Manila as a venue.” As a result of the meeting with OIC officials, the MNLF agreed to another exploratory talks and the OIC

General Headquarters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia was recommended as a possible venue. Chairman Misuari emphasized that the NUC and those concerned authorities in Manila could convey their decision *using the same agreed channel*.<sup>23</sup>

*December 1992.* Through these agreed channels, the NUC made known its unofficial response to the MNLF proposal on the venue of the talks (i.e. Jeddah). NUC officials issued a counter-proposal suggesting places like Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Jakarta. But “except for Jakarta, none of the suggested venues could be correctly considered as neutral.”<sup>24</sup> The date suggested was December 1-6, which coincided with the Second Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC in Bosnia-Herzegovina. With the venue and the date of the talks not yet resolved, “a standoff ensued, threatening at a certain stage to disrupt the peace process.”<sup>25</sup>

*Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.* The OIC Meeting in Jeddah gave the MNLF the opportunity to meet with the leaders of the Muslim *Ummah* (World Community of Muslims) that led to finding a “breakthrough in resolving this problem [of venue]”<sup>26</sup> The Indonesian Delegation headed by Foreign Minister H.E. Dr. Ali Alatas agreed to cooperate, subject to the approval of President Suharto.”<sup>27</sup>

As a result of these series of meetings of MNLF, the OIC and Indonesian officials, the MNLF was assured that Jakarta was ready to host the meeting from 1 to 15 January. However, the GRP Panel was not ready. Finally “the Indonesian Government and the OIC jointly proposed the convening of the exploratory talks from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1993”.<sup>28</sup>

The year ended with the MNLF Panel and the OIC preparing for the Jakarta Meeting. But the GRP, the MNLF realized later, failed to make any final decision on the matter.<sup>29</sup>

### **1993: Confidence Building and Preparations for the Second Exploratory Talks**

*January 1993.* MNLF senior leaders started to gather in Manila to prepare for the Jakarta Talks. A series of meetings ensued in which I acted as Secretary were held by MNLF senior leaders. The meetings especially involved the ranks of Muslim professionals, as the MNLF expected a highly intellectual discussion on the political and economic



dimensions of the proposed agenda of the forthcoming Jakarta talks. These meetings were presided by senior MNLF leaders like Dr. Abdurahman Amin, MNLF Liaison Officer to the OIC, and Muslimin Sema, Secretary General of the MNLF.<sup>30</sup>

The ideas and information and various questions that came out during these meetings can be summarized as follows:

- The MNLF should consider two important factors in the peace process: sincerity and political will on the part of the government. If the Ramos Government is able to show these elements, then there is bright prospect for future settlement.
- The MNLF and the Bangsamoro people should make a common stand—the Tripoli Agreement as the basis of the negotiations. This document guarantees the international status of the Bangsamoro struggle and the formal link to the OIC countries.
- According to information gathered from reliable source, the GRP was considering the Tripoli Agreement as only one point of reference in the talks. The GRP was expected to include the Organic Act, which implemented the Autonomy provisions in the Constitution, as another point of reference and to contextualize the talks within the parameters of the Constitution.
- Concerning the MNLF position on the issue of the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), it is up to the GRP to decide on what to do with the ARMM and the scheduled election (in 1993). The GRP knew that this has been rejected officially and consistently by the MNLF and the OIC. The postponement of the election should be considered as one of the confidence building measures from the GRP.
- There was information coming out from government sources saying that the ARMM Law can be amended and that the number of provinces may be increased from four to seven or even eight provinces.
- Moreover, the GRP wanted to formalize an agreement on the cessation of hostilities or ceasefire in the Jakarta Talks. Will the MNLF respond positively to the offer? It was strongly believed that the GRP would move for the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in the formal talks.
- Davao, South Cotabato, and Sarangani provinces are at present the focus of economic development in Mindanao. South Cotabato will experience economic boom in 5 years because of the presence of Transnational Companies (TNCs). These are included in the territories of autonomy enumerated in the Tripoli Agreement. But the GRP is expected not to give in on these provinces because of pressure from the TNCs.

- If Christian leaders were to be able to see hope in Autonomy, they would not hesitate to support. There are two groups of Christian population: the old Christian settlers, with whom we have no problem as far as the issue of autonomy for the Muslims is concerned, and the newcomers to the area who do not know the issue well enough to support for the MNLF. We need to talk to them. There is no Muslim-Christian conflict in Mindanao. The MNLF will just have to make people understand that autonomy is for all people, not only for the Muslims. It would be good if the MNLF could come up with a system that ensured a balanced relationship among the Muslims, Christians and Highlanders.
- It was argued however, that it was not a simple matter to convince non-Muslims to support autonomy. What could be tried would be to attract them through the logic of economic realities. The MNLF should not use military force, but by logical reasoning assure everybody of equitable representation.
- The territorial coverage of autonomy includes the 13 provinces enumerated in the Tripoli Agreement. What if the GRP does not agree with that? What is the MNLF's counter-proposal?
- There was a suggestion for the MNLF to prepare for the GRP stand on Constitutional processes. This is a tactical deception used by the GRP in previous negotiations.
- The MNLF should not talk about the bottom line yet. It is too dangerous to talk about it at this point in time.
- It must be admitted that in both the MNLF and GRP, there are conservative groups, the hawkish groups, and open-minded ones.
- The credentials of the GRP Peace Panel ought to be verified. And while, as much as possible, talks on the uncompleted provisions of the Tripoli Agreement ought to be finished in 90 or 120 days, the MNLF must not to abandon the talks as easily as it did during the negotiations with the Aquino Government.<sup>31</sup>
- An MNLF Peace Panel member expressed his reservations with the Indonesian Government hosting the meeting based on past experience with them. They have not been supportive of the MNLF positions in the OIC meetings. On the issue of putting a time frame, unless the MNLF were willing to exercise its "final" option when the duration expires (which it did not do the last time with the Aquino Government, when the negotiations terminated in 90 days), the setting of a time frame for the talks would be an exercise in futility and may even counterproductive.
- A military officer of the MNLF reported the position of ground

commanders—should there be failure in the negotiations, military actions ought to be initiated no matter how light and limited. The government had always created demoralization in their ranks. The MNLF has to take the initiative.

- There was information from a reliable source that Haydee Yorac, Chairman of the National Unification Commission, was resigning from her job and that the NUC would not take part in the talks with the MNLF; Yorac was pursuing very consistently her idea for a separate talks with MNLF and with the MILF; Yorac was suggesting a separate Panel to negotiate with the MNLF.

All of these I put into writing and sent to the MNLF Chairman for his information and reference.

On January 19, Hadji Murshi Ibrahim,<sup>32</sup> Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs of the MNLF, who just arrived from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, came over to my residence and handed to me my appointment signed by the MNLF Chairman dated December 28, 1992 in the form of a Directive No. 01 appointing me as “SPECIAL EMISSARY of the MNLF Chairman, Central Committee, on the peace process with the present Philippine Government under President Ramos.” It continues: “In order to be able to carry out your task effectively, you are hereby authorized to set up your office in Manila. Accordingly, you shall be principally responsible in serving as our channel of information to and from the Philippine side.”

According to Hadji Murshi, the MNLF Chairman signed my appointment inside a Mosque in Jeddah. Earlier, in a letter dated November 25, 1992 sent from Jeddah, the MNLF Chairman responded to my letter-reports to him<sup>3333</sup> I was already sending reports to Chairman Misuari in his offices abroad since 1983 but I started to sign my name in the reports only in 1992 when I submitted my report on the results of the 1992 elections saying, “*With sincerity and commendation, I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter (dated November 12, 1992) that you sent to us through Brother Murshi Ibrahim. Your reports have given us the real picture anent the Ramos administration and its policy towards the Bangsamoro people and the MNLF-led Jihad Fii Sabilillah, and it serves as our frame of reference in the formulation of policy making.*”<sup>34</sup>

**GRP Denied Jakarta Talks.** But as the MNLF and OIC officials were preparing for the trip to Jakarta, Manila newspapers<sup>35</sup> carried the

news about the planned meeting including vital information that were then kept under wraps. The following day, the government issued an official statement denying the report and the planned meeting in Jakarta to the dismay of the MNLF and the OIC officials.<sup>36</sup> Some MNLF leaders even suggested organizing the *sabilillah* (Jihad warriors) rather than be humiliated before the eyes of the world. But Ambassador Rajab cautioned the MNLF leaders to tell their people not to take drastic actions. We would report this to the MNLF Chairman for him to discuss it with the OIC officials in Jeddah. The leakage of these news items pointed to a certain government agency. The MNLF found out later, through a reliable source, that its suspicion was correct. That incident served as an important lesson learned by the MNLF in their series of negotiations with the GRP Panel.

### **The Kidnapping of Two Spanish Nuns in Sulu**

The first test of GRP-MNLF mutual confidence building came up when unidentified armed men abducted two Spanish nuns: Sister Julia Forester, 68, and Sister Fatima Urebarren, 38, in the town of Jolo.<sup>37</sup> The date was January 18. These Nuns had been working for years at a Leprosarium in this predominantly Muslim Province.

By January 21, I was in Jolo with Dr. Amin. We held meetings with the Ulama (Muslim Religious leaders) and civic leaders in the town as part of MNLF Consultation program. In the morning of January 26, the Mayor of Jolo, Hadji Suod Tan, requested to meet with Hadji Sharif Abirin,<sup>38</sup> the MNLF representative in town. I accompanied Hadji Sharif to the Mayor. In our meeting, Mayor Tan handed to Hadji Sharif a written authority the Mayor issued to bring TV reporter Cesar Soriano and his ABS-CBN TV2 World Tonight Crew to pass thru Marine checkpoints. Then the Mayor suggested that the same authority be requested from the MNLF leadership for clearance for Mr. Soriano to pass behind MNLF controlled areas.

We contacted MNLF Chief of Staff Yusop Jikiri by hand-held radio for clearance to pass through the lines controlled by the MNLF. He sent us guides for our party to reach his camp. By this time, MNLF intelligence units informed us, composite government troops were already posted in strategic areas in the town, thus causing tension. There was talk in the town that government troops were

poised to move out to launch rescue operations to get the two Spanish nuns safely from the kidnappers. This report alarmed the MNLF leadership. In response, the MNLF sounded a Red Alert signal and began to deploy combat troops in strategic areas just few kilometers outside the town.<sup>39</sup>

It was in that meeting when we got the information that government emissaries attempted to contact the kidnappers and negotiate for the release of the victims. Their efforts failed. The kidnappers instead announced a ransom demand of 10 million pesos. As a result, the peace and order situation in Sulu deteriorated. Government emissaries then approached the MNLF through Libyan Ambassador Rajab for assistance. Sulu Governor Tupay Loong even met with Dr. Amin and me on January 31, 1993 and he relayed the request of Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Alunan for MNLF assistance in the release of the two Spanish nuns.<sup>40</sup> Dr. Amin cited to Governor Loong certain conditions that could encourage the involvement of the MNLF: the non-involvement of the military in the negotiations; the postponement of the reported trip of President Ramos to Jolo pending the resolution of this problem; and the non-interference of politicians of any persuasion.<sup>41</sup>

Governor Loong gave the assurance that Secretary Alunan would ask the military not to intervene; that other groups would refrain from unauthorized activities; and that other political leaders keep a low profile. More importantly, the credit and recognition would be given to the MNLF if successful. This kidnapping issue had become the concern of the international community with the involvement of the Islamic world. Dr. Amin told Governor Loong, "We cannot give you 100 percent assurance. But we can make a silent trip to Jolo to assess the situation and request the Ambassadors to join us if there is assurance of success."<sup>42</sup>

**February 1.** In the early evening, Dr. Amin and I met with Ambassador Rajab, Secretary Alunan and a certain Mr. Lavena of the Department of Foreign Affairs at the Nelson Tower in Makati. We discussed the GRP request as relayed by Sec. Alunan and that of the Muslim embassies in Manila as expressed by the Libyan Ambassador for MNLF to help in the negotiations for the release of the Spanish nuns.<sup>43</sup>

The MNLF was in a quandary. To accede to the government's request would make the MNLF responsible for whatever happened in the negotiation if it were to fail; and even if it succeeded, some quarters might nevertheless suspect the MNLF of duplicity. On the other hand, an outright rejection of this government request—made for the first time during this period of confidence building—would not be in keeping with the GRP-MNLF understanding on a very important issue of mutual confidence building.<sup>44</sup>

In the interest of the peace talks that was then in an exploratory stage, the MNLF decided to help. Immediately, in a gesture symbolic of the Islamic solidarity of the Palestinian and the Bangsamoro peoples, the Palestinian Ambassador Musa Odeh went to Jolo along with Ibrahim Omar, MNLF Chief of Information, on February 2. I followed with Dr. Amin, Ambassador Rajab and Muslimin Sema on February 3 via Zamboanga City. In Zamboanga, we were joined by Ben Loong,<sup>45</sup> the brother of Governor Loong and Sharif Zain Jali, MNLF Civilian Coordinator. Our party was met by military officials from the AFP Southern Command and we were flown by a Philippine Air Force plane from Zamboanga to Jolo. Ambassadors Rajab and Musa Odeh traveled to Jolo to help persuade the kidnappers to release the victims.

The kidnappers were led by a young man from Talipao who started to assume the title of Commander Robot. He had with him as followers about a dozen armed men coming from other neighboring municipalities. At that time, they were not yet called Abu Sayyaf.

Back in Jolo, it was a marathon negotiation with the kidnappers. Immediately upon our arrival in Jolo on February 3, we met with Governor Loong as well as with the military and Philippine National Police (PNP) authorities in Jolo. The MNLF team requested the military to do something to reduce tension in the town caused by military build-up even though there was no assurance yet from the MNLF on the safe release of the victims. The Army Brigade Commander in Jolo agreed. Dr. Amin made it clear to the government authorities that the MNLF Team would consult the MNLF leaders in the area as soon as possible. Ambassador Rajab, addressing the military, said that he talked with the MNLF Chairman and that “we are here to do what we can for the safe release of the two Spanish nuns. If there is anything that endangers this mission, let us know.

What we are doing is very significant to our country [i.e. Libya], our people, and the Muslim Ummah! “<sup>46</sup>

The team of MNLF negotiators was composed of Dr. Abdurahman Amin, Muslimin Sema, Sharif Zain Jali, Ibrahim Omar and me. We were hosted by Governor Tupay Loong as we held important and confidential meetings in his residence with the military and police authorities. Joining us from the MNLF Camp in Timbangan were Gen. Yusop Jikiri, Chief of Staff, MNLF, Brig. Gen. Abu Amri Taddik, Deputy Secretary General for Military Affairs, MNLF, Brig. Gen. Khaid Ajibun, Chairman, MNLF State Chairman of Lupah Sug (Sulu) and Commander Aidarus Igasan, Deputy State Chairman.

*Camp Khalid Ibn Al-Walid, Timbangan, Indanan; February 3, 1993.* The MNLF Team managed the negotiation from the MNLF Camp in Timbangan. In the briefing with MNLF leaders, Dr. Amin emphasized that the directives from the MNLF Chairman was to protect the two Spanish nuns; that the Libyan Government had sought the assistance of the MNLF Chairman; and that the MNLF should give full support and cooperation to the two Arab Ambassadors.

After the briefing at around noon, selected MNLF forces led Brig. Gen. Abu Amri Taddik were sent to do the face-to-face negotiation with the group of kidnappers headed by Commander Robot in the jungles of Talipao, Sulu. Unfortunately, the group of kidnappers did not have any common stand. Anyone among them could disagree with the group and could trigger the explosion of this volatile situation. The Spanish Nuns were in danger. Many believed that the leader of the group, Commander Robot, may be persuaded to give in but the others may remain stubborn.

Gen. Taddik came back to the MNLF Camp empty handed.

Then the long wait began. We waited in the MNLF Camp until midnight as we spent the rest of the day in a dialogue with the MNLF leaders of Sulu on administrative matters. At 5:10 in the afternoon, MNLF State Chairman Khaid Adjibun requested for a meeting with the MNLF Team. He said that people in the area are aware of the arrival of the Arab Ambassadors. Our people want to meet with these Ambassadors. We invited our people to gather in the camp to honor our foreign guests. “We are extending an invitation for the Ambassadors to come to Timbangan.”<sup>47</sup>

Dr. Amin, in response to the statements of the MNLF State Chairman, cited the *maratabbat of the Parhimpunan* (the dignity and prestige of the MNLF) and its standing in the world community. The coming of the 2 Arab diplomats was something that could not be taken lightly. He endorsed the decision to MNLF State Chairman Khaid and the rest of the local leaders to make the decision on what action to take to comply with the directives of the MNLF Chairman. "We are in a crisis situation and decisions have to be made tonight," he emphasized.<sup>48</sup>

An MNLF official volunteered to say, "Peaceful negotiations should continue to be led by MNLF leaders known in the area before we take the final option."

Brig. Gen. Abu Armi Taddik said, "We are facing world opinion. This is a burden on the part of the MNLF."

Ustadz Abejarin Unti, an Ulama In-Charge of Da'wah activities of the MNLF, said, "Many people are watching this. The issue involves the dignity of our people and the leadership and has gotten worldwide attention. If no solution can be found within our hands, it is not good to our image as an organization. Let us not be emotional in this issue."<sup>49</sup>

Gen. Jikiri said that the situation is so difficult because the kidnappers are demanding the payment of ransom. It was not our policy to pay ransom. The Government also never paid ransom. "<sup>50</sup>We are caught between sacrificing the dignity of the MNLF and sacrificing the people involved. We should be ready to apply the final option, and that will be a military option," the Chief of Staff said.

"But nothing should overcome the interest of the struggle," quipped Gen. Taddik.

Ambassador Rajab, when informed of the various options being considered by the MNLF said no to the military option. He came to Sulu to save lives, he said.

As the MNLF were conducting their meeting, rumors are circulating that a certain group was offering big amount of money to the kidnappers. This rumor, whether true or not, was complicating the situation for the MNLF.

On the second day, February 4, Gen. Taddik gave us a positive



sign that the release was possible on the condition that the two Arab diplomats would come to the area and meet with the kidnappers. Because of the good news, the MNLF team hurriedly left for the town leaving me unintentionally in the MNLF camp in Timbangan. It was already about seven in the evening. Gen. Taddik volunteered to take me to Jolo in his old and dilapidated vehicle. I could not say no even if I knew I was courting danger in his company. It was rumored in the town and even among the military that police authorities suspected him to be behind the kidnapping. Commander Robot, whose real name was Ghalib Andang, was his blood relative. There could be trouble if I were seen by the military in his company. But of course it was not true. Commander Robot was his own man. He was at one time even working as an errand boy for certain influential and political clans in Sulu.

It was Governor Loong who saved the day for me. He called by hand-held radio and advised me to wait for the official vehicle that he was sending to Timbangan to get me back to town safely.

After dinner, about 8 o'clock in the evening, the MNLF Team gathered in the residence of Governor Loong for a briefing with the military and police authorities. In his opening remarks, Governor Loong congratulated the MNLF for the initial success. He must have gotten this information from a private source. He emphasized that his paramount concern was security particularly for the two Arab diplomats. The meeting place, where the Spanish nuns would be turned over, should be Tagbak and that is how far we could allow the Ambassadors to go, he emphasized. Tagbak was about 6 kilometers from the town. There was a detachment of the Philippine Marines and a checkpoint in the area. The governor suggested that the time of delivery could be the next day, Friday, between 6 in the morning to 12 noon.

Dr. Amin, in response to the statement of Governor Loong, emphasized that there was no success yet. Ambassadors Rajab and Musa Odeh were even contemplating of going to the area to talk directly with the people concerned. Ambassador Rajab said that, ultimately, his purpose of going to the area was to talk to the people for the release of the Spanish Nuns. Col. Daransiang of the Philippine Marines argued that the concern of the military was the safety of the Ambassadors. Any decision for them to be allowed to go outside of

town should come from higher authorities in government. And besides, there should be assurance from the MNLF that the victims would be released, the Marines official emphasized.

Governor Loong, trying to gauge the thinking of the MNLF said in a straightforward manner, “We are like brothers here. There should be assurance of the release so that the ambassadors can be allowed to go to the area because the *Parinta* (Government) will only allow them to meet the group (kidnappers) if they (the ambassadors) can get the nuns. If there is assurance, we can take the risk, the Governor declared.”<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Amin, who spoke for the MNLF Team, said, “We cannot predict the future. What we see, however, is a good indication for success.”

Then another Military officer, a certain Col. Paraz of the Army, asked the obvious. He said, “I would like to find out—the Ambassadors would like to meet the kidnappers? Where is the place of the meeting with the kidnappers and what assurance can you give us that nothing untoward will happen?”

Dr. Amin replied. “[We have reached] an impasse here. And we are in a crisis.” Because of this, the Ambassadors thought of going to the area to personally talk to the kidnappers. Muslimin Sema, MNLF Secretary General, also said, “We cannot give 100 percent assurance. What happens a minute from now is the province of the Almighty.”

Finally, everybody agreed that the two Ambassadors accompanied by the MNLF would go and talk to the kidnappers the following day. The military would only move up to Tagbak Elementary School. And to avoid any accidental firing, there should be no loading of arms for both sides (GRP and MNLF troops) and no one with feuding families will be allowed in the area. Dr. Amin will bring medical assistance with doctors and nurses.

The meeting adjourned after midnight but we, the MNLF Team, had yet to go back to Timbangan to brief the MNLF on what transpired in the meeting and to check on the conditions of the Spanish nuns. Then at about three o'clock in the morning, we were back in the house of Governor Loong. We rested only to wake up at five o'clock in order to prepare to accompany the Arab Ambassadors in going to Timbangan.

*Release without Ransom.* With pressure from the MNLF coupled with the prestige and moral influence of the Muslim Ambassadors, the kidnappers gave in and released the victims to the Muslim Ambassadors in the presence of the MNLF without any ransom in the morning of February 5 in Timbangan. Immediately thereafter, the victims were handed over by the two Arab Diplomats with the MNLF leaders to government authorities headed by Governor Loong in the area of Tagbak near a military checkpoint.

Having come out successful from this difficult situation, the MNLF made some announcements to the media<sup>52</sup> about the MNLF's policy against kidnapping—that the MNLF does not support anyone who would commit this criminal act, as they conduct the Bangsamoro struggle in accordance with the precepts of Islam which is anchored on Universal Peace.<sup>53</sup>

### **The MNLF and the Philippine Marines in Basilan**

**February 1993.** While concerned MNLF leaders were still in Manila reviewing the worldwide media coverage<sup>54</sup> of that successful negotiation that even featured the congratulatory note from no less than President Ramos himself, more disturbing news reached Manila from Basilan.<sup>55</sup> The papers reported on February 9 the “massacre” of 23 Marine soldiers (of which two were officers) and 6 militiamen by the “MNLF Lost Command” in Barrio Langgong in the town of Tuburan. In reaction to this incident, President Ramos was reported to have ordered a military offensive against the Muslim separatists,<sup>56</sup> ordered the relief of the Marine Commander in Basilan, and declared the province a man-made calamity area.<sup>57</sup> With the establishment of the unified Basilan Island Command headed by Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz,<sup>58</sup> what started out as an anti-crime drive against kidnappers and ambushers turned into a full-scale war. Misuari was also reported to have warned of the resumption of a bigger conflict in Mindanao.<sup>59</sup>

In our telephone conversation with the Misuari on February 11 and with Sharif Zain Jali, the MNLF Chairman instructed us to get the full details of the Basilan incident. We were also instructed to avoid interviews with the press. If an interview could not be avoided, we were to issue a general statement. We were also to give guidance and support to the civilians affected by the incident and to send

some people to gather fresh and factual information.

On February 12, I visited Senator Santanina Rasul in her residence. Despite the recent events, she was pleased to have a meeting with us. I briefed her on developments in the peace talks, particularly on certain issues with the NUC. She committed to help and to take up the matter directly with President Ramos. She advised us to be realistic and to strengthen and develop our people. We did not have to be poor, the Senator said. She would give us full support, as she believed that President Ramos was a sincere and a reasonable leader.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, the Basilan incident, described then as “the largest government loss to the MNLF”<sup>61</sup> in years, became an irritant to the fragile GRP-MNLF relations. Compounding this already tense situation in Basilan were the reported bomb explosion at the Zamboanga International Airport on February 28 which injured twenty-five people;<sup>62</sup> the kidnapping of a local businessman and his six-year old grandson in Isabel, Basilan;<sup>63</sup> the burning of houses and the evacuation of thousands of families from the affected areas in Tuburan, also in Basilan; and the kidnapping of a Spanish priest, Fr. Bernardo Blanco, in Kumalarang, Basilan, on March 18<sup>64</sup> followed by a series of violent incidents in the province.

There was also the political angle to the tense situation: DILG Secretary Alunan was reported to have warned the “absentee” Basilan Governor Gerry Salapuddin “to put a stop” to criminality in the province or face “administrative sanctions.”<sup>65</sup>

The events that unfolded in Basilan had raised doubts on the fate of the GRP-MNLF talks. But behind the scene, I continued my contacts with the Libyan Ambassador, Congressman Ermita, the National Unification Commission headed by Chairwoman Haydee Yorac,<sup>66</sup> and other GRP officials.

In our meeting with the Libyan Ambassador and Dr. Jundam in the Ambassador’s residence on February 24, our assessment of the situation then was that President Ramos was sincere in his intentions to resume negotiations with the MNLF; that Speaker Jose De Venecia was not yet fully aware of what was happening; and that Congressman Ermita was pursuing his own formula. In our meeting earlier with Speaker Jose De Venecia, he had said and was quoted in the papers that there was an ongoing “telephone diplomacy” between the GRP and the MNLF. He was referring to the frequent telephone calls

between the Misuari and Jaafar and between Ermita and me. We realized later that it would not serve the interest of the MNLF to continue this telephone conversation with GRP officials, or to pursue a one-on-one meeting between the MNLF Chairman and any GRP official in a nearby country, without the participation of the OIC.<sup>67</sup>

**March, 1993.** Oddly enough, this was precisely what Ermita wanted me to do. In our meeting on March 1, he asked me to give him the telephone number of the MNLF Chairman in Jeddah so that he could talk to him directly. He also indicated a desire to see the MNLF Chairman personally in a nearby country. He said he wanted to explain personally the reasons for the delay in the talks and would like a preliminary discussion on the talking points for the formal agenda.<sup>68</sup>

In response, I made him understand that: 1) Talking to the MNLF Chairman by telephone was not advisable, as it may be subject to speculation and may put them both in bad light before the eyes of other MNLF leaders; and 2) Meeting with the MNLF Chairman in a nearby country for a pre-exploratory conference was not possible, as this was not consistent with the understanding made in Tripoli.<sup>69</sup>

I also intimated to him that the MNLF leadership was not yet convinced of his personal motive in spearheading the negotiation due to his negative track record in the past with the MNLF. He still had to do something positive in order to convince the MNLF of his intentions. The personal disposition of the MNLF Chairman did not necessarily reflect the official policy of the MNLF.<sup>70</sup>

On March 3, I met with NUC Chairperson Haydee Yorac in her Office. I took up with her the following issues of the day as reported in the national dailies: the surrender of some MILF and MNLF forces to Speaker Jose de Venecia; the militarization of the ARMM; and the bombing incidents in the ARMM.<sup>71</sup>

On the report on the alleged surrender of MILF and MNLF forces to Speaker De Venecia, we thought that the GRP should be careful on this because these people may not be real MILF or MNLF rebels and may just be out to make money. Besides, the GRP would appear to be engaged in doubletalk as it was not consistent with the GRP peace initiatives. Besides, real Muslim rebels could not possibly be coming down because they were now aware of the ongoing peace talks.

Moreover, in order to build confidence in the peace talks with the MNLF, there should be a reduction in the military presence in the ARMM. Too much militarization was not conducive to the peace talks.

Regarding, the rash of bombings in the ARMM, I told Chairwoman Yorac that these could be the handiworks of any of the following:

1. Followers of certain politicians out to harass their political rivals.
2. Plain bandits and criminals out to disturb the situation
3. Plain civilians expressing their disgust over the ARMM election.
4. MNLF lost command.
5. Extremists and radical groups.
6. Third party who did not want the “friendly relationship” now being developed between the GRP and MNLF.

Congressman Ermita joined us in that meeting and we discussed the tense situation prevailing then in Basilan. News reports coming out of Basilan already contained descriptions of “fundamentalist Muslims” playing a big role in the conflict.<sup>72</sup> I explained to the NUC Chairwoman that the “Fundamentalist Muslims” were Muslims who followed the fundamentals of Islam and that there was nothing wrong with that just as there was nothing wrong with the Christians following the fundamental teachings of the Church. The key difference lay in the nuances of extremists and radical positions within the ranks of the Muslims. This was also a common problem in certain Muslim countries (e.g. Egypt, Algeria). According to a prominent Muslim scholar, “extremism is the direct outcome of a deficiency in thinking... an antithesis of *da’wah* (preaching) and therefore should not exist in normal conditions. Although it is in part a reaction against oppression, it has also resulted from a deficient or distorted knowledge of the basic sources of Islam.”<sup>73</sup>

On March 12, Ambassador Rajab relayed the information to the MNLF Emissary about the readiness of the Indonesian Government to host the Second Exploratory Talks in Jakarta on April 14-17, 1993. On March 14, Dr. Abdurahman Amin, calling from Jeddah, gave the same information as according to the advice the MNLF Office received from the Indonesian Consulate in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He then instructed me to proceed to Jolo to meet with Gen. Jikiri, the MNLF Chief of Staff. Ermita also called me on March 16 and

requested me to inform the MNLF of the schedule of the Jakarta meeting and to tell them that the NUC was also ready for that meeting.

On March 20, The MNLF Chairman called me from Tunisia, on his way to attend the OIC meeting. He told me of the new developments and gave me some instructions.

But as the MNLF prepared for the second exploratory talks in Indonesia, the situation in Basilan continued to deteriorate. Fr. Blanco remained in the hands of his kidnappers. After series of failed contacts, the military gave a five-day ultimatum for the release of the victim otherwise, or an all-out military assault would be conducted against the kidnappers.

March 25 was Election Day for the new set of ARMM officials. The papers had earlier made reports based on military intelligence that possible sabotage operations could be carried out by elements from the Muslim extremist group known as *Mujahideen* Commando Force (MUJCOF). The sabotage and bombing operations, according to the reports, were designed to disturb the ARMM election. The names of rebel commanders listed in the report were mostly prominent MNLF leaders. The source of the news was DILG Secretary Alunan. Because of this news item, I got a call from a friend from the media, a professional journalist, Ms. Joan Orendain. She was there in the Press Conference called by Secretary Alunan. I told her that Secretary Alunan must have been getting the wrong information because the news that came out from him was definitely inaccurate.

Through the initiatives of Ms. Orendain, I met with Secretary Alunan over lunch at Illustrado Restaurant in Intramuros on March 23. In that meeting, I denied, among others, accusations of possible MNLF involvement because the MNLF was under instructions from the MNLF Chairman not to engage in any violent activities, provided that GRP forces did not enter any MNLF territory.

I must have impressed Secretary Alunan so much with my grasp of the MNLF leadership and my close connection to them that he invited me again to a private meeting, this time at the SOUTHCOM Headquarters in Zamboanga City on March 25. We were joined in that meeting by SOUTHCOM Chief General Romeo Zulueta; Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, the Commander of the Marines in the South; and Gen. Job Mayo, PNP Regional Command 9 Commander. That

meeting gave me the opportunity to explain to those top AFP and PNP officials in Mindanao the policy of the MNLF and hinted at the organization's status of "military readiness" in connection to the reported plan of the military to take over Timbangan and Indanan, both of which being MNLF-controlled areas in Sulu. I emphasized to them that such an attack, if it were to happen, would be considered by the MNLF as a provocation and may trigger a military confrontation that could jeopardize the on-going peace process.

As a result of that meeting, Secretary Alunan gave his assurance in a note to MNLF Chief of Staff Gen. Yusuf Jikiri, with the concurrence of the three Generals present, that the AFP and PNP movements were intended only for the ARMM elections and were not against the MNLF.

I brought the message to the MNLF Camp in Pasil, Indanan in Sulu and personally gave the note of Secretary Alunan to Gen. Jikiri. Immediately, all MNLF commands were given advice not to engage any AFP and PNP units moving in the area unless they entered the area without due coordination with the MNLF, in which case, MNLF units could then exercise their right to self-defense. They were further advised to stay in their camps or in their respective residences.

The holding of the ARMM elections that day, March 25, turned out to be relatively peaceful, contrary to earlier predictions published in the papers.

*April, 1993.* On April 4, I received another SOS telephone call from Secretary Alunan in Manila. He requested me to relay a message to the MNLF Chairman for MNLF assistance in the negotiations for the safe release of Fr. Blanco. He informed me that he had also met with Ambassador Rajab and made the same request. Immediately, I made a telephone call to the MNLF Chairman who was then in Islamabad, Pakistan preparing to attend the OIC meeting. After explaining to him the message of Secretary Alunan, the MNLF Chairman gave the go signal to assist the GRP in the negotiations for the release of Fr. Blanco.

The MNLF Chairman also called from Pakistan on April 11 and advised me to inform members of the MNLF Panel to proceed to Jakarta for the Second Round of Exploratory Talks. He said he received a message from President Suharto through the Indonesian Consulate in Islamabad inviting him and the MNLF Panel to come to Jakarta



for the talks. He instructed me to stay behind and proceed to Basilan to coordinate MNLF efforts in the negotiations for the release of Fr. Blanco.

*April 12.* We had a meeting with Ambassador Rajab, Sharif Zain Jali and Sec. Alunan in the residence of Ambassador Rajab. In that meeting, the GRP and the MNLF agreed to come up with a joint effort to effect the peaceful release of the kidnap victims in Basilan. Initially, I managed to get in touch with Ustadz Abdullah Hamza, an Ulama from Basilan. I requested him to make an assessment of the situation.

### The Second Exploratory Talks – Defining the Modalities

*Cipanas, West Java, Indonesia.* The Second Exploratory Talks was held at the *Istana Presiden*, Cipanas, West Java, Indonesia on April 14-16 and was hosted by the Indonesian Government.<sup>74</sup>

The Indonesian Government was represented by no less than Foreign Minister H.E. Ali Alatas. In his opening statement, Minister Alatas expressed “the constant readiness of his government to assist in pushing forward the peace process...in line with the mandate of the Indonesian Constitution seeking ‘the achievement and maintenance of a world of greater peace, justice and security’...[and urged] both sides to consider certain measures that [would] create the necessary and conducive atmosphere of mutual confidence that could help ensure the success of further substantive talks...[such as the] cessation of armed hostilities and other appropriate measures.”<sup>75</sup>

H.E. Ibrahim Saleh Bakr, OIC Deputy Secretary General for Political, Legal and Minority Affairs, represented the OIC Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Hamid Algabid. The OIC message as read by Ambassador Bakr stated that the OIC “was convinced that the problem of the Muslims in Southern Philippines could best be resolved by sincere and constructive negotiations between the parties within the framework of Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity; and aimed at the full realization of the objectives, purpose, and commitment embodied in the Tripoli Agreement of 1976.”<sup>76</sup>

Congressman Ermita headed the GRP Panel. In his opening statement, Ermita emphasized “the policy of President Ramos of placing peace at the forefront of all efforts at national progress and

development; the commitment of the NUC to pursue a national peace program based on the principled and peaceful resolution of armed conflict with neither blame nor surrender, but with dignity to all concerned; the desire of the GRP to exhaust all avenues to peace under the realm of Philippine sovereignty, territorial integrity, the Constitution and democratic process; [and] the undiminished commitment of the GRP to render the full measure of autonomy to Muslim Filipinos in line with the spirit and intent of the Tripoli Agreement of 1976.”<sup>77</sup>

Ermita further emphasized that the mandate of his Panel “was not to negotiate the substantive issues but to further explore a viable framework for peace with the MNLF and the agenda for projected formal negotiations...administrative requirements and public information guidelines.”<sup>78</sup>

Chairman Misuari headed the MNLF Panel. He stressed in his opening statement “the honorable intentions of the MNLF in coming to the talks, even as he expressed his concern over the fragility of the undertaking...[for] the area of coverage of autonomy under the Tripoli Agreement is final, unalterable and should be unconditionally implemented...a sine qua non for the peace process to move forward...the MNLF will not accept an imposed formula.”<sup>79</sup>

The meeting proper was presided over by H.E. S. Wiryono,<sup>80</sup> Director General for Political Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, as a representative of Minister Alatas.

Misuari reiterated the proposal he articulated in the First Exploratory Talks emphasizing that the venue of the Formal Talks should be held in any OIC member country. He also rejected the constitutional and legal bases of the creation of the ARMM and emphasized that the MNLF was not a party to the said process. He demanded the full implementation of Article II of the Tripoli Agreement. The said article reads:

The area of the autonomy for the Muslims in Southern Philippines shall comprise the following: 1. Basilan; 2. Sulu; 3. Tawi-Tawi; 4. Zamboanga del Sur; 5. Zamboanga del Norte; 6. North Cotabato; 7. Maguindanao; 8. Sultan Kudarat; 9. Lanao del Norte; 10. Lanao del Sur; 11. Davao del Sur; 12. South Cotabato; 13. Palawan; 14. All the cities and villages situated in the above-mentioned areas.<sup>81</sup>

Ermita, on the other hand, expressed the GRP position that the

Formal Talks be held in the Philippines. He at the same time submitted a set of talking points outlining the constitutional and legal steps undertaken by the GRP to comply with all the provisions of the Tripoli Agreement based on the 1973 and 1987 Constitutions that led to the creation of the ARMM, the compliance with national constitutions being a universally accepted democratic act merely adopted by the Philippines.<sup>82</sup>

After exhaustive discussions, the parties signed a Statement of Understanding, which contained, among others, the following:

1. The formal talks will be held on or before June 30, 1993 at a place to be mutually agreed upon;
2. The agenda for the formal talks will focus on the modalities for the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit, to include:
  - a. Those portions of the Agreement left for further or later discussion; and
  - b. Transitional implementing structure and mechanism
3. The talks shall be held with the participation of the Secretary General of the OIC and the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six
4. The talks shall be supported by a Joint Secretariat to be appointed by both parties
5. All press releases in relation to the peace talks shall be approved by both parties.

One of the final items added is the provision which states that “the foregoing agreements are subject to the approval of the highest authorities of the GRP; such approval to be communicated to the MNLF and the Office of the Secretary General of the OIC as soon as possible.”<sup>83</sup>

The Cipanas Meeting somehow raised the level of confidence of both parties to move forward to the Formal Talks. The MNLF, however, remained silent on the issue of Ceasefire despite such a suggestion from Minister Alatas in his opening statement. One urgent matter that remained unresolved was the issue of the venue for the Formal Talks. The MNLF maintained that the venue should be any of the OIC member States. The GRP Panel made no categorical reply and both parties agreed to resolve the issue soon.

Then the MNLF Chairman was reported in the papers to have ordered MNLF Commanders in Basilan, “as a token of sincerity to

the peace talks”<sup>84</sup> to help in the negotiation for the release of Fr. Blanco. Reportedly, the MNLF Chairman was encouraged to make this public announcement because of the level of confidence raised in the Cipanas meeting. The decision to help in the negotiation was in fact made earlier at the request of the GRP officials through Ambassador Rajab.

### **The Negotiations for the Release of Fr. Blanco**

It was announced in the papers that Fr. Blanco was already released by the kidnappers to the MNLF<sup>85</sup>. Even President Ramos had to make a quick trip to Zamboanga City in anticipation of the handing over of the Spanish priest to him.<sup>86</sup> But the much publicized event did not materialize because the Abu Sayyaf succeeded in putting the kidnappers and Fr. Blanco under their control. The group that originally abducted Fr. Blanco was not the Abu Sayyaf. It was just plain civilian armed group previously identified with the MNLF.

I proceeded to the MNLF Camp in Timbangan in compliance with the instructions of the MNLF Chairman to give briefings on the results of the GRP-MNLF Cipanas 2<sup>nd</sup> Exploratory Talks to MNLF Chief of Staff Yusop Jikiri, Abu Amri Taddik and Hadji Murshi Ibrahim and other MNLF leaders on April 19.

In the afternoon of April 20, I moved to Zamboanga City. And having verified that Fr. Blanco was still in the hands of the kidnappers, I proceeded to Basilan on April 21.

***Basilan.*** In the company of Asmad Abdul, a self-confessed Abu Sayyaf senior leader with an assumed name of Abu Hussein<sup>87</sup> I proceeded to Basilan and, with Arlyn De La Cruz of ABC Channel 5 and her cameraman, I went to the MNLF Camp of Commander Ustadz Bashir Jailani in the mountains of Lantawan Municipality to relay personally to the MNLF the instructions of the MNLF Chairman. Commander Bashir told us of his initial moves to negotiate for the release of the Spanish priest but it was sabotaged by the Abu Sayyaf. Because of what he did, he sensed an antagonism from the Abu Sayyaf. He told us that the area in the vicinity of his camp was very dangerous. His men saw armed men believed to be members of the Abu Sayyaf roaming around the vicinity. And as we walked away beyond hearing distance from Asmad, he told me to be careful of Asmad because the

man was a top ranking Abu Sayyaf leader.

I also coordinated with local government officials headed by Governor Gerry Salapuddin, SOUTHCOM Officials, and Philippine Marines Commander General Ruiz.

*Contacts with the Abu Sayyaf.* I was able to make direct contacts with the Abu Sayyaf leader Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalani by hand-held radio through Asmad Abdul on April 21. The Abu Sayyaf leader gave me clearance to enter their camp. But I declined the offer and instead requested to meet with Abdurajak one-on-one in neutral ground. The Abu Sayyaf leader did not agree. My reason for not agreeing to come to the Abu Sayyaf Camp was that I was suspicious. At the same time, the Marines were closing in on the Abu Sayyaf Camp in Upper Kapayawan about 15 Kilometers from the town proper. MNLF Forces were also moving closer to the area from the other side.

On April 26, with transport facilities provided by Governor Salapuddin and a security escort and upon his advice, I went with Asmad to Tipo-Tipo to seek the support and cooperation of Ustadz Wahab Akbar. Many people then, including Governor Salapuddin, believed that Ustadz Abdurajak would listen to the counsel of Ustadz Wahab. It was a rough travel by car along bumpy roads made more difficult by heavy rains and passing through several military checkpoints. We had flat tires twice. We passed through Tuburan, the site of the bloody encounter between the Philippine Marines and the MNLF in early February. We reached Tipo-Tipo in mid-afternoon and we met with Ustadz Wahab in the company of MNLF Commander Jan Jakilan. I explained to him my purpose in coming to see him with instructions from the MNLF Chairman, but Ustadz Wahab declined to give his support because he said the Abu Sayyaf would not release the Spanish priest without at least a million-peso ransom. And besides, he said, he could not help us because it was not consistent with his pronouncements. He was the one encouraging the kidnapping of Christians in Basilan in his Friday *khutba* (sermon) in order to provoke a war between Muslims and Christians so that the Christians would be scared and leave Basilan. Ustadz Wahab further warned me not to approach the Abu Sayyaf in the name of MNLF Chairman because Ustadz Abdurajak harbored ill feelings against the MNLF Chairman. I was disappointed with the result of

that meeting with Ustadz Wahab. We traveled back to Isabela in the middle of the night empty-handed.

The following day, April 27, we (I, Asmad, Arlyn de la Cruz and a certain relative of Ustadz Abdurajak) were supposed to proceed to the Abu Sayyaf Camp in Upper Kapayawan, as suggested by Governor Salapuddin. But at the last moment, I decided not to go as I pondered the results of our earlier meeting with Ustadz Wahab. I did not want to expose myself to possible danger and to allow the Abu Sayyaf to possibly humiliate me and reject the authority of the MNLF Chairman. But Arlyn and her cameraman went with Asmad and a guide from the Abu Sayyaf and they proceeded to the Abu Sayyaf Camp on that day. They stayed overnight.

Later Arlyn told me of what she saw. The man who was introduced to her as Ustadz Abdurajak did not talk much. The one who did the most talking in an interview with her was a man named Edwin Angeles. Asmad Abdul was the one stage-managing what was happening around the Abu Sayyaf camp. What Commander Bashir told me earlier about Asmad was true indeed as witnessed by Arlyn. And when Arlyn reported this to PNP Region 9 Director Job Mayo, she got the impression that Gen. Mayo and Asmad Abdul were friends.

In the early evening of April 30, I went up with Sharif Zain Jali and Ustadz Abdullah Hamza to the camp of Commander Bashir in Lantawan. We had a long meeting that went way past midnight. It was concluded that the Abu Sayyaf would not release the Spanish priest without payment of ransom.

In the last exchange of messages with the Abu Sayyaf by hand-held radio through Asmad Abdul, it was understood that the ransom demand was settled at one million pesos. Basilan Governor Salapuddin was informed about this and requested time to think about it. But the Marines already moved in and fighting broke out in the perimeter of the Abu Sayyaf Camp in Upper Kapayawan.

### **Escape to Freedom**

On May 4, Asmad called me to report that negotiations were cut off because of the military operation. In the evening of May 5, while there was lull in the fighting, Fr. Blanco reportedly saw an

opportunity to escape. He made a go for it and, within a few hundred meters, he reached safety among local militia surrounding the Camp. When the military assault resumed in the morning, the Camp was overrun but the Abu Sayyaf was nowhere to be found. They left the little boy, who was kidnapped earlier, to the MNLF Commander who in turn released him to Gen. Ruiz. The Military claimed to have killed over 50 Abu Sayyaf members but only three dead bodies were found in the deserted Camp.

On May 12, I received a letter from Secretary Alunan who said, "Once again Allah has listened to our prayers and valued the efforts to secure the safe release of Fr. Bernardo Blanco and Luis Anthony Biel (the little boy). Our endeavors for a worthy cause led to the successful conclusion of our joint operations, despite desperate efforts to derail them."<sup>88</sup>

### **What is the Abu Sayyaf?**

To my personal knowledge, the founding of the Abu Sayyaf was the result of the meeting between Ustadj Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, Asmad Abdul, and other religious leaders in Basilan, with financial and international support from Muhammad Jamal Khalifa.

These Abu Sayyaf founders met sometime in 1989. Ustadj Abdurajak had just come home from studies in Tripoli, Libya. While studying in Libya, he must have gotten acquainted with the Afghan who was a famous resistance leader by the name of Abdu Rasul Sayyaf, a man in the payroll of the CIA who was then fighting a war against Soviet troops. Ustadj Abdurajak was critical of the leadership of Misuari and the MNLF on the issue of negotiations with the government. Ustadj Abdurajak believed in continuing the armed struggle under the name of Jihad.

Muhammad Jamal Khalifa is a brother-in-law of Osama Bin Laden and also a brother of the third Highest Official of the Rabita Al-Islamia (World Muslim League). He was Director of International Islamic Relief Organization supported by the Rabita with an office in Makati City in the Philippines.

## The OIC Meeting in Pakistan

The 21<sup>st</sup> Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) was held in Karachi, Pakistan, from 25 to 29 April. As usual, the MNLF Chairman attended the said meeting and delivered his report on the progress of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. Congressman Ermita and some GRP officials, notably the newly installed ARMM Governor Lininding Pangandaman<sup>89</sup> and Office on Muslim Affairs (OMA) Executive Director Dimas Pundato,<sup>90</sup> also went to Pakistan to observe the meeting.

The OIC meeting, as in the past, became the subject of speculations in the media. Chairman Misuari was again reported to be moving to push the issue of MNLF membership in this Pan-Islamic body. On the other hand, no less than President Ramos was also reported to have initiated intense diplomatic efforts to get the OIC support to the Peace Talks in favor of the GRP position.

The MNLF Chairman reported on the results of the exploratory talks with the Philippine government as he suggested to the OIC “to exert maximum moral and political pressures on the Philippine government on an individual and collective basis.”<sup>91</sup> As a result, the OIC “issued a resolution commending the leadership of the MNLF for their consistency in being ready to act for the settlement of the problem of Muslims in Southern Philippines peacefully through negotiation. The Conference also welcomed the Two Memoranda of Understanding with which the concerned parties crowned their preliminary talks held in Tripoli, Libya and Cipanas, Indonesia. The Conference also called upon the concerned parties to initiate their formal talks, on dates agreed upon in the preliminary talks, with a view to achieving an equitable, comprehensive and final solution to the problem.”<sup>92</sup>

But the same resolution also “regrets the return of violence to Southern Philippines and calls on all concerned parties to create the necessary and conducive atmosphere of mutual confidence that could help ensure the success of further substantive talks.”<sup>93</sup> This refers to the reported violent incidents in the South, particularly the clashes in Basilan, Sulu and Maguindanao between MNLF and GRP forces and also between GRP and Abu Sayyaf and MILF forces. The OIC, through this resolution, in effect invited both the GRP and MNLF to discuss the possibility of reaching a Ceasefire Agreement.



## Exchange of Letters.

Contacts with Congressman Ermita continued. He informed me that Senator Biazon was going to Saudi Arabia for an official trip and he brought with him a letter from the NUC addressed to Chairman Misuari. The letter dated 25 May 1993 and signed by NUC Chairperson Haydee B. Yorac, contained the following important points:

1. GRP-MNLF Formal Talks to commence on 30 June 1993
2. Venue for the talks shall be in any province of Mindanao (Misuari's choice)
3. The participation of the OIC Secretary General and the OIC Committee of Six shall be in the same manner as their participation in the exploratory talks
4. On the agenda of the talks: The Tripoli agreement to serve as starting point for negotiations; provides for rights and obligations that are not self-executory; the options for transitional structure and mechanism must be consistent with democratic processes provided for in the Philippine Constitution.

There was also a separate letter for the OIC containing similar points. Senator Biazon indeed met with Chairman Misuari and the OIC Secretary General twice (June 10 and 12) in Jeddah as the MNLF Chairman told me about it. But except for the proposal on the venue to be "shifting" (that is, for there to be separate venues for different stages of the talks), the said meeting did not really produce any significant understanding because the message brought by Senator Biazon was a virtual rejection of the requests of Misuari made in the two exploratory talks.

Misuari in fact did not feel comfortable with the contents of the May 25 NUC letter. He sent a three-page reply dated June 12 saying, "Your letter is totally unacceptable to us as it tries to squeeze a fait accompli advantage over us should we commit the mistake of accepting it."<sup>94</sup> He urged President Ramos to stick to the letter and spirit of the Cipanas Statement of Understanding. He also reiterated in the said letter the position of the MNLF: the proposed date (June 30) is acceptable; the talks should be held in a neutral venue. Jakarta could serve the purpose as proven by the previous meeting in Cipanas.

There was a standoff. Misuari was emphatic in his letter and had expressed to me his growing distrust, on the basis of the NUC letters, of the GRP's intentions. The NUC was too technical in their

approach even at this stage to the extent that the MNLF perceived it to be the one making the process difficult. But contacts with Ermita and Ambassador Rajab continued. I gave them copies of the letter of the MNLF Chairman for their reference.

*June 12.* In my meeting with Rajab, I sensed that the Ambassador was not happy with the developments regarding the issue of the proposed opening ceremony for the talks. He said the GRP was insisting that the opening ceremony be held in the country to preserve national honor. He planned to talk to Defense Secretary De Villa, Speaker De Venecia, Secretary Romulo, Congressman Ermita, and even the President to clarify this matter.

*June 23.* Another letter came from the NUC signed by Chairwoman Yorac addressed to Chairman Misuari dated June 18, 1993. "The original copy", the NUC Chairwoman said, "was sent through diplomatic channels." She had called me by telephone a day before to tell me about her letter to the MNLF Chairman. The letter proposed the following: the new date (July 15 to 23); the agenda (the Cipanas Understanding and the contents of the NUC letter dated May 25); the "shifting venue" concept with the opening ceremony to be held in the country, preferably in Mindanao, and the negotiations to proceed in the Embassy grounds in Jakarta.

This new NUC letter compounded what appeared to the MNLF as already a difficult situation. If the first letter was "totally unacceptable" according to the MNLF reply of June 12, the second one made it even difficult on the part of the MNLF to make a reply.

*June 27.* I met with Ermita. I gathered from him that the NUC would be dissolved soon. But he requested me to tell the MNLF to reconsider the position of foreign venue so that the opening ceremony and the formal substantive talks can follow.

*June 28.* I called up the MNLF Chairman in Jeddah. Misuari said, "Tell them (the NUC) that we do not negotiate through exchange of letters...Why is the NUC doing this?...It is not even the highest authority in the country...I do not want to respond to this anymore...We might end up rejecting the peace initiatives of the President...Is the President aware of this?"

In that telephone conversation, Misuari made clear to me that he could not agree to the Opening Ceremony in the country because

the OIC representatives could not attend. Besides, the decision that the venue be held in a neutral foreign country was made with the OIC Committee of Six and it is not easy to change that decision. The OIC Committee of Six and the OIC Secretary General are attending the talks, therefore it should be held in an OIC member State. Regarding Muslim membership in the GRP Panel, we couldn't do anything about it if the Government insisted on doing it even if they knew we didn't like it. We could only hope that they would choose Muslims who would not become obstacles to the talks. However, Cong. Jaafar should be in the GRP Panel, if possible.

Aware that the NUC would be dissolved soon, as intimated to me by Cong. Ermita, I then suggested to the MNLF Chairman to send his reply addressed directly to President Ramos if it was difficult to respond to the NUC letter. The term of the NUC was expiring on June 30. The MNLF had three options: first, communicate directly with the President; second, wait for the replacement of the NUC; or third, make NO reply at all, which is not a good option. The first option was chosen.

True enough, President Ramos declared the term of the NUC to have ended on June 30 and the NUC Final Report was submitted to the President on July 1.<sup>95</sup> Then, Justice Secretary Franklin Drilon assumed the post of Acting Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process. His office replaced the NUC. My contacts with Ermita and Rajab continued despite these developments that seemed to drag the talks nowhere. The three of us were in direct contact with our principals—Ermita with Speaker De Venecia and President Ramos; Rajab with Tripoli; and I with the MNLF Chairman. Those were informal but official lines of communication that continued to operate even though the formal contacts reached a deadlock. That was a very critical factor during that period—*communication*. It could not be allowed to breakdown.

*July 4.* The MNLF Chairman then sent his reply addressed directly to President Ramos. The letter contained, among others, the following important points: the MNLF Chairman accepted the proposed date (July 15 to 23); rejected the inclusion of the May 25 NUC letter as part of the Agenda; reiterated his proposal for a neutral foreign venue acceptable to all parties; rejected the suggestion of holding the Opening Ceremony in the country.

Before his closing statements, the MNLF Chairman emphasized the finality of his decision by saying “this is our final word on the matter...we hope to meet the GRP Panel...in Jakarta on the appointed date.”

*July 5.* I formally transmitted the letter through Rajab as per instructions from the MNLF Chairman following the terms of the Tripoli Statement of Understanding. Ermita was given advance copy for his reference.

But this was followed by a lull in the contacts between the two parties. It appeared then that the GRP Panel was having some difficulty responding to the letter of the MNLF Chairman. There was also no word from Ermita. The MNLF Chairman called from Tripoli to inquire on the GRP Panel response and emphasized that he was not expecting another letter from the GRP but a go signal for the Jakarta Formal Talks. He was specifically asking if there was any word from President Ramos and Ambassador Manuel Yan who would head the GRP Panel. He also asked about the extent of the participation of De Venecia in the peace process. He instructed me to continue coordination with Rajab.

*July 21.* In my meeting with Congressman Ermita in his office, I got the impression that the NUC Chairwoman tried to ease him out and kept him away from the developments in the negotiations. That explains the lull in our contact. It was Yorac who had brought out the idea of having the opening ceremony in the country, and President Ramos had thought that the MNLF would be agreeable to it. But now Ermita was invited back to NUC meeting by Secretary De Villa and Secretary Drilon.

Ermita then proposed, in order to facilitate the start of the formal talks, to do away with a formal opening ceremony in the country. Instead, the MNLF Chairman could just authorize top MNLF leaders to come to Manila, meet with the GRP Panel in the presence of OIC ambassadors, make a joint statement to officially kick off the opening of the formal talks, and send official notice to the Jakarta Government to host the formal talks.

*July 22.* I was with Dr. Tham Manjoorsa, Chief of MNLF Intelligence, and we made a telephone call to Misuari in Tripoli because he wanted to render a report to the MNLF Chairman. Misuari then

informed us that he had met with House Speaker Jose De Venecia who was visiting Tripoli. They talked about the hot issue of the day—the venue of the GRP-MNLF Talks.<sup>96</sup>

*July 25.* This time, it was Misuari who initiated a call from Tripoli asking for new developments. He instructed me to see Ermita and Rajab. I would meet with Ermita on August 6 and be given copy of the letter of Secretary Drilon addressed to the MNLF Chairman. The said letter expressed positive response to the July 4 letter of the MNLF Chairman and requested that the MNLF issue a “Statement of Readiness” so that the formal talks could start.

The MNLF Chairman’s reply dated August 10 (but received in Manila on August 20) was immediately transmitted the following day to Secretary Drilon through Ambassador Rajab. There was a positive tone in the letter where it said: “Finally, as to the ‘statement of readiness’, Your Excellency’s government shall be informed in due time through the usual channel. The MNLF expects to complete its present consultation with the OIC officials and the Ministerial Committee of Six within the next few days.”<sup>97</sup>

### Other Distractions to the Peace Process

*Political Feuds in Sulu.* In the meantime, while there was slow progress in the peace process, I was requested as MNLF Peace Emissary to assist in the settlement of local feuds in Sulu. The matter was brought to the attention of Secretary Alunan because the parties involved were Muslim political leaders. After intensive negotiations with the support of the DILG and the PNP Region 9, the warring clans in Luuk, Sulu signed the “Peace Pact” on September 18, 1993 in the presence of DILG Secretary Alunan and Sulu Provincial Officials. Congressman Ermita would later on refer to this event, in an informal conversation with the OIC officials in Jakarta and in the presence of the MNLF Chairman, as a concrete example of what the government and MNLF, together, could accomplish to restore peace and order in the area. Ambassador Yan, Chairman of the GRP Panel, even cited this event in his Opening Statements... “Our President has been grateful for this demonstration of solidarity and cooperation.”<sup>98</sup>

*Abu Sayyaf and MNLF Lost Command Activities in Basilan.* The peace

and order situation continued to deteriorate in the Basilan. Congressman Ermita called me and requested information from the MNLF side. He wanted to know, he said, so that he could report to the President the real situation in Basilan.

We provided Ermita with our summary report on the Basilan situation. Reports gathered from MNLF sources indicated that the Abu Sayyaf Group led by Ustadz Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani left Basilan, particularly their camps in Upper Kapayawan, after the military operations conducted by the Philippine Marines against them last May. Their armed followers composed of young men were actually less than 50 but they were reinforced by relatives and some civilians at the height of the operations against them. As a result of the military offensive, the mainstream group dispersed into the islands while the civilians returned to their normal lives. Their leaders were even reported to have gone to the MNLF to ask for forgiveness for what they had done but were rejected. They had been virtually disbanded as an armed group and had now returned to Islamic preaching activities in the islands but taking precautions against the military and even MNLF leaders who were angered by their activities and their announced objectives of challenging the MNLF leaders.

The Lost Command groups who were natives of Basilan were still in their respective communities but maintained their distance from the regular forces of the MNLF in the area. These groups followed no rules in their operations and were open to manipulation by other third parties in the area who may use them for activities designed to create confusion and chaos in Basilan to gain financial or political benefits.

From the end of May towards the end of July, there was relative quite in Basilan.

Sometime in July, the Chief of Staff of the MNLF-Bangsamoro Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. Yusop Jikiri, with his staff and political aides, visited Basilan upon the invitation of his Deputy Chief, Ustadz Bashier Jailani. This visit was even contemplated in the early part of the year but was postponed due to the military operations conducted by the Marines against the Abu Sayyaf in May. The visit was also made upon the invitation of other MNLF leaders in Basilan who requested the presence of the Chief of Staff to pacify feuds that had arisen among civilian leaders in the area and to address the growing

incidence of crimes, kidnappings, and robberies attributed to some armed groups tagged by the military and the media as the Lost Command.

*Arrests in Lantawan.* This municipality is adjacent to the capital town of Isabela. This area is generally considered to be under the control of the MNLF. Ustadz Bashier Jailani had been holding camp in the area since the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement between the MNLF and the government of President Aquino in 1986. In the negotiations and rescue of past kidnap victims, the latest of whom were Fr. Fernando Blanco and Luis Anthony Biel, Lantawan became the staging point for MNLF coordination with government forces. SOUTHCOM officials, particularly the Marines under the command of Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, were aware of this and had been able to establish some of kind of “warrior’s peace” with MNLF Commander Bashier.

During this period of relative quite, a group of Muslim traders buying gasoline and fuel in Isabela were apprehended by the Marines and their products confiscated on suspicion of being supporters of the MNLF. It was as if there was a return to the martial law years where civilians could just be arrested anytime, anywhere, and under any circumstance. This incident angered the relatives and friends of these Muslim traders—who were armed as most Muslims were in the area—and, seeing that the arrest and seizure appeared illegal and discriminatory under the present “democratic space,” took the law into their hands and snatched civilians who turned out to be Christians living in the Lantawan area. They demanded the release of the Muslim traders and the return of the confiscated goods in return for the release of their hostages.

Immediately, this armed group was tagged by SOUTHCOM officials and the media as a Lost Command Group of the MNLF.

Discreet negotiations were immediately conducted between civilian representatives of the MNLF and the Marines. After everything was clarified by both parties, the goods were returned and the Muslim traders were released. In exchange, the hostages were also freed by their captors without any ransom.

Towards the end of July, however, AFP officials from SOUTHCOM announced the plan to conduct military operations

in Lantawan against the Abu Sayyaf and the MNLF Lost Command. Media representatives from Manila were even invited to come to the area to cover the operations that were scheduled reportedly on July 28 to 29. True enough, reporters of Channels 2 and 5 started feeding news from Basilan regarding this operation as early as July 28. It was announced by SOUTHCOM that the operations were not intended against the MNLF.

MNLF General Jikiri was still in Lantawan when he was informed of this planned military operation by the Marines under Brig. Gen. Ruiz. The announcement by SOUTHCOM that the operations were not intended against the MNLF but against a group of over 400 armed men identified as kidnappers, Lost Command, and Abu Sayyaf appeared to the MNLF as a smokescreen behind either a secret but official military agenda or a personal agenda of some SOUTHCOM officials—or both. This suspicion was in view of the following:

- The Abu Sayyaf Group was now virtually out of Basilan while the so called Lost Command Groups and the kidnappers were scattered armed men roaming in the safety of the Basilan jungles without any permanent base or command.
- Lantawan was an identified MNLF-controlled area, so why should it become the target of the operations?
- There was no report of any kidnapping (except for the “gasoline incident” which was settled earlier), murder, robbery, etc. So what was the purpose of the military operations?

It was therefore natural for the MNLF to be suspicious of the whole plan. It could be a smokescreen to cover a secret military agenda to “undermine the peace process.” At the same time some military officials in SOUTHCOM would benefit from such an activity in the form of an increased military budget for war materials and logistics, nationwide media coverage (as some of the generals were fond of publicity), and certainly promotion in rank for a job well done “in the most critical part of the country.”

Despite all of these, however, MNLF General Jikiri returned to his HQ in Sulu but left instructions to the MNLF Basilan Command to be on a RED ALERT and to maintain a defensive position against possible military attack.

On *July 31*, the Marines were reported to have landed in Lantawan Municipality proper. The MNLF, true to the instructions of the



Gen. Jikiri, withdrew to a defensive position at the outskirts of the town to avoid a confrontation with the incoming Marines and spare the civilians from being caught in the crossfire.

With the arrival of the Marines in Lantawan proper, reports came of civilians becoming “virtual hostages” of the Military, as no one was allowed to move in and out of the cordoned area. There were reports also of looting and the confiscation of farm and fishing implements. Animals such as cows, goats and chicken were being taken by the “invading military.” Since the MNLF had vacated the area including their checkpoints and no other armed group stayed in the vicinity but the Marines, the Marines were reported to have committed these atrocities.

Reports reaching the MNLF camp indicated that over 200 civilians in the town were herded by the Marines into one area and appeared to have been used as human shields for possible counterattack from any armed elements in the area.

Then, as reported in the papers on August 2, successive bomb blasts rocked the town of Isabela where eleven people were reported injured and Cagayan de Oro City where two people were killed and fourteen people were wounded. In Zamboanga City, a bomb blast also occurred in several locations wounding 12 people, mostly Christian civilians. All of these bombings and kidnappings were attributed to the Lost Command and to kidnappers who allegedly claimed responsibility for these activities. The groups were reported to have demanded a stop to the military operations in Lantawan, otherwise more bombings and kidnappings would follow.

It was clear then that all these bombings and kidnappings were reactions to the military operation in the area. A new name came up, Angoleng Sali, who was reported to be from Atong-Atong, the center of Lantawan and the site of the ongoing military operations. He and his group had not been identified in the past as Lost Command or as kidnappers but it was believed that his immediate family and relatives had become virtual hostages of the Marines in the cordoned area, with their homes and properties endangered or even been destroyed. He was reported to have claimed responsibility for the bombings in Isabela and Zamboanga City while the kidnappings were attributed to a certain Jul Jilang, whose name came up previously in the kidnapping of Fr. Bernardo Blanco.

Therefore, instead of reducing the number of armed groups in the area, the military operations purportedly designed against Lost Command and Kidnappers, actually turned a peaceful Muslim family like that of the Angolengs into an armed group now being tagged as another Lost Command provoked to challenge the might of the Philippine Marines following the traditions of Jikiri against the American Colonial Forces and of Maas Hadji Kamlon during the Magsaysay era. The only difference is that while Jikiri and Kamlon faced the superior might of the AFP in actual combat, the Angolengs and their followers chose the path now being labeled as terrorism, as in the case of bombing incidents in many cities in Europe and the Middle East.

But to the Angolengs and people like them, this was a defensive act against a strong enemy in defense of their families, their lives, and their homes and properties as a result of an unprovoked military operation.

As gathered by the MNLF Command, the Marines bombarded areas in Lantawan such as Bulan-Bulan, Bolangsa, Panyongan and Kalang. 53 Mortar shells were counted by the civilians in the area to have exploded on August 2. On August 3, mortar fires continued from three to six o'clock in the afternoon. This military operation did not appear as simple police action against lawless elements like the kidnappers and the Lost Command, but was instead reminiscent of the war in the 1970's where most of Basilan were leveled to the ground by military bombardments and search and destroy operations.

The civilians then appealed to the MNLF leadership to do something as they viewed the situation becoming like the war in the 1970s'. They could not understand why they had to suffer like this just because of the alleged crimes of a few misguided elements that may not have been in the area in the first place.

Meanwhile, SOUTHCOM officials continued to justify the ongoing military operations as against the Abu Sayyaf, Kidnappers and Lost Command Group, but until this time no military engagement had yet been reported with these armed elements. What the military had to face were the cries of civilians and the reactions of other armed elements through bombings and kidnappings—elements they themselves brought into existence.

### Telephone Diplomacy

In a telephone conversation that I had arranged between Chairman Misuari and Cong. Ermita (Misuari was in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and Cong. Ermita was calling from his office in Makati on August 13, 1993), Misuari requested Ermita to work for the withdrawal of the Marines in Basilan in order to avoid further escalation of the conflict.

In this conversation, Ermita also took the opportunity to explain to Misuari the proposal of the GRP for the MNLF Chairman to send his official representative to bring his official message regarding the readiness of the MNLF to start the Formal Talks. The message could be sent through the usual channels—the Libyan Embassy in Manila and me as the Chairman's Special Emissary.

The Indonesian Government could be officially notified by the Department of Foreign Affairs through their Embassy in Manila about the readiness of the GRP and the MNLF to proceed to Jakarta for the Formal Talks and asked of their availability for the Formal Talks and the date of its commencement.

The MNLF Chairman told Ermita that the matter of the sending of the official message should be presented first to the OIC Secretary General and to the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six based in Jeddah being the Host country as a matter of diplomatic courtesy.

The MNLF Secretariat Office in Manila also received by facsimile the letter of the MNLF Chairman to Secretary Drilon, then Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process dated August 10 (received August 20), which we sent to the GRP through the Libyan Embassy in Manila as, agreed in the Tripoli Understanding.

The MNLF Secretariat also sent a letter to Ermita, dated August 22, reminding him of what he discussed with Chairman Misuari in their last telephone conversation.

As the situation in Basilan deteriorated, the peace process also headed for an impasse on the issue of where to hold the Opening Ceremony and of the venue for the Formal Talks. This was also the assessment of Ambassador Rajab who said that while he could understand the position of the MNLF Chairman in not agreeing to the opening of the talks in the Philippines, he could not disagree with the GRP position. Even his Home Office in Tripoli was also worried about this impasse. He felt that President Ramos was deeply worried about this because it involved honor and prestige of a sovereign country. I also sought the opinion of Congressman Jaafar

about it but the latter could not suggest anything anymore because he also believed that it was already the final position of the GRP Panel. I then sent a report to the MNLF in Jeddah about these developments particularly the impressions I got from the statements of Rajab and Jaafar.

Contacts with the MNLF Chairman, who was then in Tripoli, continued. At the request of Ermita, I arranged a telephone conversation between the two men. They talked about the situation in Basilan. Ermita assured the MNLF Chairman that the President was sincere in the talks and had ordered the withdrawal of AFP troops in order to avoid escalating the incident and as part of the confidence building measure. After talking to the MNLF Chairman, Ermita immediately called up Ambassador Yan in my presence and gave a report on this conversation with the MNLF Chairman.

*August 18.* In the early morning, I received another telephone call from Misuari in Tripoli who asked for confirmation of the withdrawal of the Marines from Basilan. I reported to the MNLF Chairman that President Ramos had already ordered no less than Defense Secretary De Villa to go to Zamboanga City to personally oversee the situation. The MNLF Chairman was happy with this news and instructed the Emissary to relay his message to the MNLF in Basilan to put down their Red Alert status and help in the release of the hostages. He emphasized that the AFP should be informed about this through Ermita and that SOUTHCOM officials were expected to reciprocate by not continuing their military operations. He further told the Emissary that from Tripoli he was proceeding to Jeddah to meet with the OIC Secretary General for consultations. This had to be made clear to the GRP through Ermita that consultation with the OIC was very crucial to MNLF decision-making.

From Jeddah, he would then proceed to Jakarta for the expected Formal Talks. President Ramos was scheduled to visit Jakarta and there was a possibility for their meeting. But the MNLF Chairman would still prefer that he meet with President Ramos in our homeland, as it would please our very much. "Please tell Ermita about this," he insisted. He instructed me to contact MNLF leaders—Muslimin Sema, Sharif Zain Jali, Duma Sani, and Atty. Dilangalen—and Rev. Absalom Cerveza to prepare for the talks in Jakarta.

There was also the good news coming from the Moro Islamic

Liberation Front (MILF). It was reported that the MILF had issued a statement supporting the MNLF position. Al Hajj Murad, Vice Chairman and Chief of Staff of the MILF was reported to have said “we find it consistent and reasonable to back up the MNLF in this negotiation because there is only one problem to solve; one sponsoring Pan Islamic body and we have a common stand as to the basis of the talks.”<sup>99</sup>

*August 21.* Sharif Zain Jali, then MNLF Spokesman, called up from Zamboanga and told the MNLF Emissary that fierce fighting was still going on between Marines and MNLF forces in the Sampinit area in Basilan. The MNLF suffered one officer killed and several wounded while the Marines suffered heavy casualties. On the basis of those reports received from the MNLF, I sent a letter to Ermita<sup>100</sup> to officially inform him about the situation. The position of the MNLF was for the Marines to simply withdraw from the area in order to avoid further military engagements. Ambassador Rajab was also briefed about the situation for his information and appropriate action. Ermita was even quoted in the papers<sup>101</sup> having made statements on his conversation with the MNLF Chairman on how to defuse the tension in Basilan so that the peace talks can proceed.

During this period, MNLF forces were reported to be gathering strength to push the Marines out of their area. It was emphasized to Ermita that MNLF leaders in the ground did not feel comfortable with provocative statements made by local AFP units since it gave the impression that the incident had already escalated into a wider conflict. Ermita assured the MNLF that he was in direct contact with the President and the DND officials and that there was no intention to escalate the conflict.

*August 26.* Ermita was reported in the papers<sup>102</sup> to have said that “MNLF Chairman Misuari has raised concerns about Basilan, specifically that of the military overrunning the MNLF camp.” While the MNLF Chief did not make the issue a condition for the talks, Misuari told him to “look into the situation... (The military) might run roughshod over the base camp of the MNLF and that would be a violation of the informal ceasefire now in place.”

Ermita further said that he informed the MNLF Chief that military operations were directed at the so-called ‘Lost Command’

and other extremists. “He (Misuari) just told me (to) kindly ensure that there will be no unnecessary incidents because he said he is receiving reports...(that) military operations could include the MNLF base camp in Basilan.”

Ermita also said a possible means of defusing the situation would have government troops withdrawing from the Lantawan-Sampinit area and the MNLF undertaking a similar move “so that the chances of contact will be smaller.”

*September 1.* President Ramos ordered the police and the military to suspend operations in Basilan so as not to jeopardize peace negotiations with the MNLF.<sup>103</sup> Congressman Ermita said this was the result of our earlier efforts and requested that the good news be relayed to the MNLF Chairman for his guidance. On September 6, the MNLF Chairman, in a live interview with a TV reporter arranged by the MNLF Secretariat, thanked President Ramos for ordering the withdrawal and at the same time said that he had already ordered the MNLF earlier to remain in their camps and avoid encounters with the Marines in the interest of the Peace Talks.

#### MNLF Letter of Readiness.

*September 12.* Meanwhile, Congressman Bensaudi Tulawie<sup>104</sup> arrived from Jeddah. He earlier went there to perform *Umrah*<sup>105</sup> and was authorized by House Speaker Jose De Venecia to deliver a message to Misuari and at the same time get a reply from the MNLF Chairman. I met with Tulawie in his residence and he briefed us on his meeting with the Misuari and with the OIC officials. He said he would deliver the letter of the MNLF Chairman to President Ramos.

*September 15.* In the company of Speaker De Venecia, Tulawie delivered the letter of the MNLF Chairman dated September 11 to President Ramos in the presence of members of the GRP Panel in Malacanang. But there was still the requirement of the GRP Panel for an MNLF official to deliver the MNLF Letter of Intent for the Formal Talks.

*September 17.* The papers came out with the report that the issue on the “opening ceremony had served as a stumbling block to the peace negotiations.”<sup>106</sup> I sent a formal report to the MNLF Chairman

regarding the events that transpired in Malacanang when President Ramos received the letter from Congressman Tulawie. Included in that formal report were some suggestions on how to go about complying with the requirement of the GRP Panel so that the Formal Talks could proceed right away in Indonesia.

September 17, 1993

His Excellency

Prof. Nur Misuari  
Chairman, Central Committee  
Moro National Liberation Front

Your Excellency:

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh!

We are transmitting herewith the letter dated September 15, 1993 addressed to your office and signed by His Excellency, Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman of the Negotiation Panel of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. Said letter was delivered to the office of His Excellency, Ambassador Rajab Abdel- Aziz Azzarouq of the Libyan Embassy in Manila in accordance with the MNLF-GRP understanding regarding exchange of notes and communications relative to the Peace Process for your information and appropriate action.

In addition, we would like to inform you of the following:

1. On September 15, Congressman Tulawie in the company of House speaker Jose de Venecia, Jr., delivered personally to His Excellency President Fidel V. Ramos, in Malacanang Palace the copies of the two letters entrusted to him by the MNLF Chairman consisting of the MNLF Letter of Intent for the formal Talks in Indonesia and the letter of the OIC Secretary General to President Ramos dated September 2 endorsing the MNLFs' Letter of Intent. The occasion was witnessed by members of the GRP Panel and other national government officials. Congressman Tulawie said that upon receipt of those letters, President Ramos said that those letters "should be given consideration" by the GRP panel. Congressman Tulawie then proceeded to tell the President and the body in attendance of his meeting with the OIC Deputy Secretary General in the presence of the MNLF Chairman wherein the new time frame was suggested in view of the difficulty to catch up with the date earlier proposed by the OIC in its September 2 endorsement (September 10 to 18). The new date suggested is between October 10 to 30, 1993.
2. Accordingly, Congressman Eduardo Ermita hastened to inform the President and the body in attendance that the GR Panel in its letter dated August 6 proposed that the MNLF Letter of Intent be delivered to the GRP by an

MNLF Representative in a simple meeting to be witnessed by Muslim Ambassadors in Manila. He also reiterated this request during his telephone conversation with the MNLF Chairman on August 13 in lieu of the earlier proposal to hold the Opening Ceremony in Manila to start the Formal Talks in Indonesia.

3. Accordingly, the MNLF Letter and the accompanying OIC endorsement were considered by the President and the GRP panel. However, in view of the changes of the date for September to October as verbally related by Congressman Tulawie to President Ramos, the GRP Panel would like to have the confirmation in writing from the MNLF. And this is now the purpose of the attached GRP letter of September 15.
4. In my meeting with Congressman Ermita today, he explained to me the rationale for this letter. He said that the MNLF Chairman can either send a written reply to this letter confirming what congressman Tulawie told them (regarding the new date) and this will be delivered by any authorized representative to the GRP Panel in a simple meeting to be witnessed by the Muslim Ambassadors: or the MNLF Chairman can just send verbal instructions to his authorized representative in Manila to confirm the same. The Press coverage of this event shall be handled jointly by him and MNLF officials in Manila in coordination with the Libyan Ambassador to avoid any deviation for this understanding. He even committed and as already contained in this letter of Ambassador Yan that the so called Opening Ceremony which the MNLF persistently tried to avoid holding in Manila shall be announced, if necessary, as being part of the Formal Talks in Indonesia. He even made some handwritten notes on this scheme (now in our possession) for clarity and advised us to consult and coordinate with Ambassador Rajab.
5. In our meeting with Ambassador Rajab today where he handed over to us this letter of Ambassador Yan, he gave his support to either of the proposals and confirmed his availability to accompany the MNLF Representative to deliver the MNLF Letter of Confirmation as requested. Ambassador Rajab sends his greetings and his high esteem to the MNLF Chairman and reiterated his readiness and that of his government to continue this mediation efforts with impartiality in the interest of peace and in the name of the Muslim *Ummah*.

Wassalam!

Most respectfully yours,

ABRAHAM (Abet) IRIBANI  
Special Peace Emissary of the  
MNLF Chairman for the Peace

Process

The news coming out from Manila appeared as if all parties were all ready and what was lacking was the “Letter of Intent” from the MNLF to be delivered to the GRP by an MNLF official. The



Embassies of Saudi Arabia and PLO in Manila issued statements supporting the talks as it was consistent with the call for peace now being heard in the Muslim World with the signing of the Peace Pact between Yasser Arafat of the PLO and Yitzhak Rabin of Israel in Washington that month.

*September 20.* I again sent a note by facsimile to the MNLF Chairman outlining the scheme as follows:

1. The MNLF Chairman sends by FAX a reply to the letter of Amb. Yan CONFIRMING what Cong. T. told them verbally particularly the new dates (Oct 10 to 30) Actually, the confirmation letter is not necessary (or a response to Yan's letter (if the Mass does not like to respond) because the letters brought to Pres. Ramos were enough, according to them. What is needed is the ACT OF DELIVERING IT BY AN AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL from us.
2. The act of delivery can be made by Sharif Zain (as Muslimin Sema and Tham Manjoorsa have returned to base and are very busy) to be accompanied by Reverend, myself, Max and other brothers based in Manila. As you instructed earlier, we do not make any statements to GRP or to the PRESS except to turn over the confirmation letter of our readiness to go to Jakarta for the Formal Talks.
3. There will be some pictorials on this occasion.
4. Press coverage will be handled by Ermita with our approval. If there is anything you want us to include in the press statements, please advise us.
5. Rajab agreed to accompany the group on this occasion and can even invite other Ambassadors if necessary.

Other info: The Philippine press carried the news of forthcoming talks in Jakarta very positively – making it appear that all parties are ready and what is lacking is the delivery of that “Confirmation Letter” from you. Even PLO (Sept 16) and Saudi Arabia (Sept 18) thru their Embassies here have issued statements to the PRESS about their positive expectations and support to the TALKS following the trend set by the signing of the PEACE PACT between Arafat and Rabin. As soon as we fulfill this “one important requirement” of the GRP (delivery of the letter) on time, any delay on the Jakarta talks cannot be blamed on us. According to Ermita, as soon as the turning over is finished, GRP immediately ask Jakarta of its availability within the new dates. Once Jakarta confirms certain dates, GRP officially informs OIC about it and OIC will inform Jakarta and your office about the GRP confirmation of their readiness for the Jakarta talks on definite dates within October.

If this is OKAY with you, the delivery of the letter can be done while

President Ramos is in Jakarta. I already discussed this with Cong. Tulawie and he supports this idea already as he was informed by Ermita about it. Cong. T. sends you his salaam and assurance of his support on whatever decision you make on the issue and in our jihad.

**September 23.** I met with the Political Counselor of the Malaysian Embassy, **Abu Hassan** in Mandarin Hotel. I briefed him on the progress of the talks. I also met with Congressman Ermita in the same hotel where he gave me a personal note addressed to Chairman Misuari.<sup>107</sup> In this note, Ermita told the MNLF Chairman that “our channel of communication thru Abet and the Libyan Embassy really assist us in a much faster exchange.”<sup>108</sup>

**September 24.** The MNLF Emissary again sent another message by facsimile informing the MNLF Chairman of the urgency of the situation. But the MNLF Chairman remained silent on the issue.<sup>109</sup>

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarkatuh!

After I got your call of evening 20 Sept, I met with Cong. Ermita in the afternoon of 22 Sept. I explained to him what you told me and even showed him my notes of our conversation emphasizing your comments on the “SPS” ; sought to formalize; start of the Formal talks; next stage (implying there is first stage as very dangerous; shifting venue (not correct; all contained in the letter of Amb. Yan. His response to these comments is now contained in his attached personal letter to you which he is sending on the basis of the mutual confidence established during your first meeting in Tripoli last year, he said. He did not make any comment (in his letter) on the SPS but promised to do something about it including the possibility of not using it in future communications. It is good, he said, that these things are clarified this early so that these can be avoided as we proceed further into the talks. Informed that your are preparing a reply to the letter of Yan, despite his advise to the contrary, you can proceed, he said, if only to get your confirmation of what I told him as it can serve as reminders in future discourse.

As regards the turning over of the Statement of Readiness, I asked his opinion about the possibility of my being authorized (by you) to do so. He said it is not advisable for many reasons, the most important are: He would not like me to be publicly exposed as I am working with government and might give some people even simple basis to criticize the process as some kind of drama and may put both of you in an embarrassing situations; he wants to preserve my identity as a channel who has the confidence of both parties; and considering my limitations, the pressures and public scrutiny as a result of full press coverage of the event might be too much

for me to withstand. I also asked Sharif Zain about this and his opinion is the same but hastened to add that if it is your final decision, we just have to do it and I fully agree with him. It is not that I am afraid to do the job. I am already here. But the publicity and the added status that may result might be too heavy for me and may instead reduce my efficiency and effectiveness to handle future sensitive assignments.

That is why Cong. Ermita maintains his earlier suggestions that recognized senior leaders in the movement do the job.

At this point, allow us with all due respect, to put forward the consolidated views of our brothers. They say that even if senior military leaders from us will deliver the letter it does not symbolize a warrior bowing down (or surrendering) to the enemy. Rather, it could symbolize a warrior (like Salahuddin) accepting the offer of peace (they made in Tripoli last year and in Capanas last April). Arafat, the terrorist personified has become the FACE OF PEACE (when he reached out first to shake the hand of Rabin used in decades of cracking Arab skulls) Peace is not made with friends but with enemies, Rabin said, justifying his Peace Pact with Arafat.

Sharif Zain Jali is ready and willing to do the job and we can assist him in case the two leaders named by Ermita will not be available. He fits well into these roles as he signed for you after your meeting with Mrs. Aquino in 1986. He will do it, he said, just so we can make the first crucial and symbolic gesture of PEACE leading to the Formal Talks. Just as the "April surprise" may have resulted in the Capanas meeting, who knows, this symbolic first step to peace that they so persistently requested might lead into bright prospects in the Jakarta meeting. We also submit the offer of Amb Rajab of his availability to accompany us including others like him (PLO) (Saudi) in this undertaking. Their presence surely puts formality to the event but it could not mean "formal opening or start" since there is no formal meeting to take place but simple turning over of the letter and we will make it clear in our prepared press statements (you will send us). On the other hand, their presence could guarantee faithful compliance (by the other party) of our understanding. Should there be deviations, the Ambassadors are obligated to take our sides. Viewed from here, the other party, at this point, cannot afford to deviate (on this event) that may jeopardize the expected cordial atmosphere in Jakarta meeting. It is the personal request of the President, Ermita keeps on reiterating and they cannot afford (in the name of the President) to spill the First Blood (so to speak) in this historic battle for peace, this early.

Wassalam!

Abet Iribani  
Special Peace Emissary

*September 25.* About 5 in the afternoon, Congressman Ermita called up inquiring on the letter from the MNLF Chairman. But there was no reply yet from the MNLF Chairman.

*September 27.* It was the MNLF Chairman who called up. He asked for more details and news clippings on the Ramos visit to Indonesia. But he still remained silent on the “Letter of Readiness” addressed to the GRP. On September 29, I met with Ermita and Rajab in the latter’s residence. We called up by phone Muslimin Sema and Sharif Zain. They also participated in the discussion. We discussed possible ways on how to facilitate the start of the formal talks.

*September 30.* I again sent a message to the MNLF Chairman by facsimile as follows:

Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarkatuh!

After our telephone conversation of 27 Sept I met with Amb Rajab the same day. We analyzed your position and he understood it well. He sensed a hardening of your line, which he personally feels not advisable (on this particular request). He supports your idea but he sees possibility of an impasse’ if we stick to our line and might be misunderstood as not contributing to confidence building. He advised me then to meet with Ermita. I met with Ermita in the morning of 29 Sept and he has been updating the President about this directly. I explained to him what you told me and he was very sad about it as he noticed a hardening of your position on what he considers a “simple request” which does not augur well in future substantial talks. He personally requests you to consider your position on this issue, as it is the personal desire of the President. I emphasized to him though about your concern on the letter of Amb Yan and not on his personal letter as you have confidence in him. He reiterated his assurance that he means well and the President and they will not allow anyone or group within GRP ranks to spoil this occasion. He suggested that we meet with Amb Rajab. In the evening of same day, the three of us met in Rajab’s residence. Ermita reiterated before us his assurance and that of the President, saying that the President just want to signal the start of the Formal Talks in Jakarta thru the delivery of your letter by your official emissary so that the Philippine public will know and this could mean our giving courtesy and respect to the desire of the President. I brought out the idea of OUR issue being made to appear as DOMESTIC on this occasion. Ermita maintains that this has been the line of GRP ever since based on OIC Res. 18 of 1974 in KL. Amb Rajab pointed out also that the other party can also maintains the international character of the issue with legal basis as supported by pronouncements of other international bodies. Both parties can make their interpretation as it suits their needs and may depend on how strong can they sustain their view and gather

international recognition. It is then advisable as both of them agreed not to discuss this matter on the occasion requested. Then Ermita proceeded to propose an alternative. This letter (you don't have to send one, he said, you can just dictates to me simple statements for this occasion) can be delivered by Sharif Zain and I and other brothers and we will be accompanied by Amb Rajab and others like him, if possible, to GRP Panel (and the President may even meet with us) instead of military leaders as he earlier requested. If we can make it on October 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 that will be very significant as it is ONE YEAR from the signing of your UNDERSTANDING in Tripoli. This is even meaningful, Ermita added, as it took them ONE YEAR to bring us to the FORMAL TALKS. As regards the STATEMENTS to be released by GRP to the PRESS, you can refer to his proposal as contained in his personal letter. We can also make our own separate statements. Then after this, coordination with the JAKARTA offices for the dates of the FORMAL TALKS can be started while we still have sufficient time (which is running out already). This meeting lasted for more than two hours.

When I reached home last night I called up MUSLIMIN SEMA and SHARIF ZAIN JALI (by phone) and told them about this meeting. They gave their full support to this and encouraged me to relay this to you for consideration. Even Dr. THAM before he left also gave his consent to his if it is OKAY with you. All responsible brothers whom we consulted about this also gave their positive opinion on this matter. Sharif Zain is ready to come to Manila anytime for this purpose. He encouraged me to tell you that he supports this idea if only to break this impasse' and allow us to proceed to JAKARTA with clean conscience. There in Jakarta, we can tell them about what we feel in the presence of the OIC and other foreign officials.

As to the statements of the President during his visit to Jakarta, Ermita said he must have been misquoted by the Press. The President told him that in his meeting with President Suharto, Ramos only gave his thanks for hosting the Cepas meeting last April and this forthcoming formal talks, lest he might be accused of influencing the Jakarta government in their favor. Amb Rajab thank the President thru Ermita for this gesture and said that the OIC including his Government would just like this issue settled so that we can start talking about development. They even cited the trend now set by the ARAFAT-RABIN meeting in Washington with Pres. Clinton and the high hope now for peace in the Middle East as a result of that. Ermita gave his assurance of the sincere intentions of the President in making peace a reality with us so that together we can actively participate in this regional and global movement for peace and economic development. Ermita even added that the public has already accepted the idea of foreign venue for our meeting and no significant opposition to that. This is one positive sign for the talks, he said.

Wassalam!

Abet Iribani  
Special Peace Emissary

*October 2.* The MNLF Chairman called up. He wanted to talk to Ermita and Rajab. I called the Ambassador and proposed a teleconference with him, Ermita, and Misuari. It was on this occasion after assurances from Congressman Ermita and Ambassador Rajab that the MNLF Chairman agreed to send written affirmation of the “MNLF Statement of Readiness” earlier sent through Congressman Tulawie.

*October 3.* Congressman Ermita called up to remind me about the letter. He said that he already reported the good news to President Ramos and Secretary De Villa that the Letter of Readiness from the MNLF Chairman was coming. He also said that President Ramos was asking about me. He said, “[Abet] is doing his job well as our conduit to the MNLF Chairman.” Ermita told me, “Abet, your role in history is assured.”

*October 4.* The MNLF ‘Letter of Readiness’ addressed to President Ramos was received in Manila. It said:

Accordingly, we are instructing Brother Ustadz Habib Zain Jali, the Religious Adviser to the MNLF Chairman, to deliver this message to Your Excellency’s office. He shall be accompanied by H.E. Ambassador Rajab Azzarouq, the honorable Libyan Ambassador to the Philippines as well as Mr. Abraham Iribani and Dr. Mashour Jundam. Habib Zain Jali will have neither power nor authority to do anything apart from merely delivering this message to Your Excellency’s office. And by no means should this act of delivery be construed as ‘Opening Ceremony’ or ‘The First Stage of Formal Talks.’<sup>110</sup>

Ermita was immediately informed about the letter. Arrangements for the holding of the “Special Meeting” between the representatives of the GRP and MNLF Panels eventually followed.

*October 5.* This special meeting was held at the Asian Institute of Tourism, Quezon City in the afternoon amidst a heavy downpour.

The MNLF Panel was composed of Sharif Zain Jali, Rev. Absalom Cerveza, and me as the MNLF Emissary. Ambassador Rajab accompanied the MNLF Delegation as a witness. The GRP Panel was composed of Ambassador Manuel Yan, Rep. Eduardo Ermita,

ARMM Vice Governor Nabil Tan, Former Maguindanao Governor Sandiale Sambolawan and Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology Professor Rody Rodil.

“With the submission of the MNLF statement of readiness, the road has been cleared for the commencement of the formal talks after a whole year since the first round of exploratory talks with the MNLF were held in Tripoli, Libya on October 2-3, 1992.”<sup>111</sup>

*October 6.* Our delivery of the “Letter of Readiness” was reported in all the national papers today. But the situation in the ground was still volatile. At 11 in the morning, Muslimin Sema, MNLF Secretary General, called from Cotabato to inform us of ongoing military operations in the Camp of Datu Romy, MNLF Vice Chairman for Sultan Kudarat, in Barrio Laguindang, Isulan, Sultan Kudarat by the 38<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion. Isulan had been under intense bombardment since 10 o’clock that morning. Also in the boundary between Bukidnon and North Cotabato, fighting had been going on for three days. I immediately called up Congressman Ermita about it. He promised to take up the matter with Sec. De Villa.

*October 7.* At the celebration of the Libyan National Day<sup>112</sup> at Intercontinental Hotel and in the company of several senior MNLF leaders, we met the Indonesian Ambassador to Manila, H.E. Pieter Damanik (who would play an important and critical role up to 1995). He was gracious enough to invite us to visit the Indonesian Embassy. We were also introduced to the Egyptian Ambassador and many members of the Diplomatic Community. They were congratulating the MNLF Delegation for the delivery of the “Letter of Readiness,” which is symbolic of the MNLF desire for peace.

And among the crowd of Philippine diplomats and government officials, I saw Congressman Ermita and Sec. De Villa, also guests of the Libyan Embassy. Secretary De Villa assured us that he already gave instructions to AFP troops in Cotabato not to escalate the fighting. The tension indeed had subsided in the area according to reports we received from the ground).

Finally on this occasion, Ambassador Rajab intimated to us that he met with President Ramos who was happy about the positive developments. He asked me to inform the MNLF Chairman about this.

**October 22.** I acknowledged for and in behalf of the MNLF Chairman receipt of the Resolution No. 03 dated 16 October 1993 of the Council of Elders for Peace and Order of the Province of Sulu as personally delivered to my office by the council's authorized representative, Habib Sharif Abirin. The title of the Resolution was "Resolution Urging the Philippine Government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) to Settle for Everlasting Peace."

**October 23.** I also received various letters and messages supporting the GRP-MNLF Negotiations addressed to the MNLF Chairman as follows:

1. Letter from the Mindanao Independence Movement dated October 20, 1993 signed by their senior leaders
2. Letter from the South Cotabato Muslim Association addressed to the Organization of Islamic Conference thru the Office of the Secretary General
3. Letter from the Moro Peasant for National Liberation of Mindanao addressed to the Moderator of the Peace Talks between the MNLF and the Philippine Government
4. Message of Support from the Nagkakaisang Asosasyon ng Magsasakang Moro (NAAMO) of Cotabato city addressed to the MNLF, the Philippine Government and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia.

**October 24.** I flew to Jakarta together with the rest of the members of the MNLF Panel by Garuda Airlines to attend the First Round of GRP-MNLF Formal Talks.

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## Endnotes, Chapter 2

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<sup>1</sup> Press Statement, "It's Danding Cojuangco who Gets The MNLF Chiefs Nod For Philippine Presidency," issued by MNLF Chairman Misuari from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 1992 supporting the presidential candidacy of former Ambassador Eduardo Cojuangco (with Joseph Estrada as the Vice Presidential candidate). This writer distributed copies of the statement to Philippine Reporters in Manila on May 7, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



- <sup>4</sup> During the 1976-1977 GRP-MNLF Talks, government civilian and military officials were reportedly ly under instructions to talk to MNLF Commanders to persuade them to surrender. Brig. Gen. Bautista was one of those who implemented the plan in Jolo. His attempt ended in what the AFP called “the massacre of Gen. Bautista and 32 of his men in Patikul, Sulu” by MNLF fighters in October 1977. It was not a premeditated plan from the MNLF Leadership. The local MNLF Commanders in Patikul decided to take action on what they thought was a real danger to their command and the leadership of Commander Usman Sali, then a recognized civilian leader of the MNLF in Sulu.
- <sup>5</sup> Dr. Abdurahman Amin served then as the MNLF Liaison Officer to the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He completed his medical studies in a University in Cairo, Egypt. He initially worked in a Hospital in Libya and transferred to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1975 where he joined the MNLF leaders who were then trying to set up office in that country. He is now Adviser to Governor Misuari in the ARMM.
- <sup>6</sup> Fidel V. Ramos, “Break Not The Peace: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Negotiations, 1992-1996” (November 1996). Page 4.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> H.E. Rajab Abdelaziz Azzarouq was the Ambassador of Libya to the Philippines from 1991 to 1999. He was the longest serving Libyan Ambassador to the country. He played a very crucial role in the negotiations from the start to the finish and even went out of his way on many critical occasions to help negotiate for the release of kidnap victims in Sulu, Basilan and Zamboanga. He is highly respected by the MNLF leaders. During critical times in the talks, he gave counsel to the MNLF and suggestions to the GRP, when so requested. When ceasefire violations were reported (from both sides), he was the one person that the MNLF and even the GRP always listened to for advise to defuse the tense situation. (Hereinafter referred to as Ambassador Rajab).
- <sup>9</sup> See also Ramos, *Break Not The Peace...*, p.6.
- <sup>10</sup> Rep. Jaafar belongs to a prominent family of educators in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Some top-ranking MNLF officials were his high school classmates and Chairman Misuari knows him personally well. Despite having been with Government as Governor of Tawi-Tawi and Member of the Batasang Pambansa during the Marcos Administration, he was able to maintain the trust and confidence of the MNLF.
- <sup>11</sup> Ramos, *Break Not The Peace...*, p. 10.
- <sup>12</sup> “Statement of Understanding,” signed on October 4, 1992 in Tripoli, Libya between the GRP Panel headed by Rep. Eduardo R. Ermita and the MNLF Panel headed by Chairman Nur Misuari with the kind and generous assistance of the Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriyah.
- <sup>13</sup> Statement of Rep. Eduardo R. Ermita, Head of the GRP Panel, First Exploratory Talks with the MNLF, Tripoli, Libya, October 3, 1992.
- <sup>14</sup> Tripoli Statement of Understanding.
- <sup>15</sup> Our source is a member of the Diplomatic Community in Manila that time who requested anonymity. He showed us in confidence a document with the title “Notes for the GRP Panel Negotiating with MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari.”
- <sup>16</sup> Tripoli Statement of Understanding.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Report of the MNLF Chairman to the Enlarged Quadripartite Ministerial Committee through the OIC Secretary General, Jeddah, K.S.A., 22 February, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Bangsamoro Republik, Moro National liberation front, Office of the Chairman, "MNLF Chairman

<sup>23</sup> Reply to the NUC'S Statement of 22 October 1992 On the Outcome of the First GRP-MNLF Exploratory Talks in Tripoli, Libya from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 1992." Jeddah, K.S.A., 7 November 1992.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, MNLF Report to the OIC, February 1993.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ramos, *Break Not The Peace*, p.13.

<sup>30</sup>Others who attended this series of meetings held January 2, 9, 10 and 13 in Manila were: Almarim Tillah, Sarif Zain Jali, Atty. Didagen Delangalen, Rev. Absalom Cerveza, Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, Ibrahim Omar, Engr. Mike Lalanto, former Commissioner, Regional Consultative Commission, Prof. Taha Basman, former Commissioner, Regional Consultative Commission, MNLF General Duma Sani, Hadji Ben Kusin, Rolly Solano, Ustadz Wadja Esmula, Sumulong Sadala, Hadji Ajidin Hussin Engr. Mandi from Cotabato, Jun Ekong, Ms. Fatmawati Salapuddin, Dr. Max Jundam and Abet Iribani who acted as Secretary.

<sup>31</sup> Rev. Cerveza was also a member of the MNLF Peace Panel headed by Habib Mujahab Hashim during the negotiations with the Aquino Government.

<sup>32</sup> Hadji Murshi Ibrahim was a classmate in High School (Sulu High School Class 73). His former name is Dawaim Darul. He completed Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Mindanao State University,

Marawi City and went to the King Abdulaziz University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to finish a course in Qur'anic Science. He joined the MNLF after his studies and accordingly was sent on military training to Syria. He returned to Sulu in 1985 and operated in Lanao Province as he speaks the Maranao dialect fluently up to 1992 when he was called by the MNLF Chairman to report back to Jeddah for another assignment. He was on his way back to Sulu when he passed by my house to give me my appointment.

<sup>34</sup> Nur Misuari, MNLF Chairman, Letter to Abeth Iribani, dated November 25, 1992 from Jeddah,

Saudi Arabia (Personal file).

<sup>35</sup> The Philippine Star, January 6, 1993 and other national dailies.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, (Understandably, President Ramos did not mention this in his book). Reuters (R) an International Wire Service, reported from Zamboanga City, February 7, carried by Arab News, Jeddah, February 8, that "President Ramos, while on an official visit to Jolo, Sulu, insisted that peace talks to settle the Muslim separatists problem must be held in the Philippines and not on foreign soil."

<sup>37</sup> Philippine Daily Inquirer, January 18, 1993

<sup>38</sup> Hadji Sharif Abirin is a recognized businessman in the town of Jolo. His younger brother,

an MNLF Commander, was killed in an encounter with government troops in 1985 in Pasil, Indanan, Sulu. The MNLF Chairman trusted him that he was designated as the MNLF Protocol and Liaison Officer in the town. He died of natural cause while performing the Umrah in Macca, Saudi Arabai in 1996.

<sup>39</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Notes on the Peace Talks, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Diary, 1993.

<sup>41</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Notes on the Peace Talks, 1993.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Notes on the Peace Talks, 1993.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Now the Provincial Governor of Sulu, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Notes on the Peace Talks, 1993.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Malaya*, February 6, 1993.

<sup>53</sup> Ramos cited this important incident in his book, *Break Not The Peace*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>54</sup> Associated Press (AP), Zamboanga City, February 5, carried by *Arab News*, February 6, 1993.

<sup>55</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 10, 1993.

<sup>56</sup> United Press International (UPI), Manila, February 12, carried by *Saudi Gazette*, February 13, 1993.

<sup>57</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 19, 1993.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. This Marine Officer later on became the Co-Chairman of the GRP-MNLF Joint Ceasefire Committee and gained the confidence and respect of the MNLF in the performance of his peacekeeping function until the signing of the Peace Agreement in September 1996.

<sup>59</sup> Associated France Press (AFP), Manila, March 1, carried by *Arab News*, March 2, 1993.

<sup>60</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Diary, 1993.

<sup>61</sup> The Manila Times, March 20, 1993.

<sup>62</sup> Associated Press (AP), Zamboanga City, February 28 carried by *Arab News*, March 1, 1993.

<sup>63</sup> The Manila Times, March 20, 1993.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> The NUC acknowledged this contacts with the MNLF Emissary on page 18 of its Report to the President on July 1, 1993. "Subsequently, active communications continued between the latter's (Misuari) authorized emissary and the NUC in an effort to resolve issues standing in the way of the resumption of exploratory talks."

<sup>67</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Notes on the Peace Talks, 1993.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Philippine Daily Inquirer, March 19, 1993.

<sup>73</sup> Yusuf Al Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism*. American Trust Publication and The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991, p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Statement of Understanding, Second Exploratory Talks, Istana Presiden, Cipanas, west Java, Indonesia, April 14-16, 1993.

<sup>75</sup> Statement of Understanding jointly issued after the Second Exploratory Talks between the GRP and MNLF with the participation of the OIC and facilitated by Indonesia as Chair of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six and as Host Government, April 14-16, 1993. (Hereinafter known as the Cipanas Statement of Understanding).

<sup>76</sup> Cipanas State of Understanding .

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ambassador Wiryono would later on become the presiding Chairman of the Formal Talks in

Jakarta.

<sup>81</sup> 1976 Tripoli Agreement.

<sup>82</sup> Cipanas Statement of Understanding.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 18, 1993.

<sup>85</sup> The Philippine Star, April 19, 1993.

<sup>86</sup> The Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 20, 1993.

<sup>87</sup> Asmad Abdul confessed to this writer (in 1993) of being the Intelligence Officer and one of the original founders of the Abu Sayyaf Group. I met him in 1983 while still a young student in Zamboanga City. He was our lead man for the student demonstrations conducted in the City in support of the MNLF leadership up until 1989 when he met Jamal Khalifa who claimed to be a representative of the International Islamic Relief Organization. He met with Ustadz Abudrajak Janjalani in the same year and helped organize a group that became the Abu Sayyaf. He was the one who confided to me that he could not trust Edwin Angeles because he believed Angeles was a military deep penetration agent. He became very closed with then TV 5 Field Reporter Arlene de la Cruz. Right after the car bomb explosion in Zamboanga City in the first week of June 1994, he was forcibly picked-up by the military at the Marcian Garden Hotel. He was found dead with a bullet hole in his eyes hours later.

<sup>88</sup> Letter of DILG Secretary Rafael Alunan III addressed to the author dated May 12, 1993

<sup>89</sup> Former Ambassador Lininding Pangandaman won over Atty. Zackaria Candao in the

March 25, 1993 ARMM Election. He was Philippine Ambassador to Saudi Arabia in 1975 and was a member of the GRP Panel that negotiated with the MNLF in Tripoli, Libya in

1976. He comes from Lanao del Sur.

<sup>90</sup> OMA Executive Director Dimas Pundato was one time Vice Chairman of the MNLF. He assumed the post after Hashim Salamat, who was then Vice Chairman, split with Chairman Misuari after the collapse of the GRP-MNLF Talks in 1977. Pundato also split with Chairman Misuari in 1983 to form his own MNLF-Reformist Group. He surrendered to the Aquino Government in 1988 and was given the OMA position.

<sup>91</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, speech delivered at the 21<sup>st</sup> ICFM held in Karachi, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 25-29 April 1993.

<sup>92</sup> Report of the Secretary General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines to the Twenty-Second Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, December 1994.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> MNLF Chairman Misuari, letter addressed to NUC Chairperson Haydee B. Yorac dated 12 June 1993 sent from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

<sup>95</sup> See also Ramos, *Break Not The Peace*, p. 28.

<sup>96</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Notes on the Peace Talks, 1993.

<sup>97</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman Misuari to Secretary Franklin M. Drilon, Acting Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, dated August 10, 1993

<sup>98</sup> Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, Chairman, GRP Panel, Opening Statement, First Round of Formal GRP-MNLF Peace Talks, Jakarta, Indonesia, October 25, 1993.

<sup>99</sup> *The Manila Bulletin*, August 20, 1993, p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Letter to Rep. Ermita dated August 23, 1993 with attachments.

<sup>101</sup> *Business World*, August 26, 1993.

<sup>102</sup> *BusinessWorld*, by Arnold Belleza, Senior Reporter, August 26, 1993.

<sup>103</sup> *Malaya*, September 2, 1993.

<sup>104</sup> Hon. Bensaudi Tulawie was elected Representative of the 1<sup>st</sup> District of Sulu (1992-1998).

<sup>105</sup> It is a lesser pilgrimage performance, which is optional. This is unlike the Hajj, the Greater Pilgrimage, that is obligatory for every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it financially.

<sup>106</sup> *The Philippine Star*, September 17, 1993

<sup>107</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal diary, 1993.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari to President Ramos, July 4, 1993.

<sup>111</sup> Joint Press Statement issued by GRP and MNLF Panels on the occasion of the "Special Meeting" held in Quezon City on October 5, 1993.

<sup>112</sup> The Libyan National Day is September 1. But the observance may be held in some other dates convenient for the Libyan Embassy as in today, October 7.





## The First Round of Formal Talks, Jakarta



This writer conferring with MNLF Leaders in Sulu, Lt. Gen. Yusop Kijiri, MNLF Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Abu Amri Taddik, Deputy Secretary General and Brig. Gen. Khaid Ajibun, Sulu Provincial Chairman, Commander Aidarus, Commander Karabat and Habib Sharif, March 27, 1993.



*“...And fulfill every engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning).”*  
 —(Qur’an, XVII: 34)

### **Jakarta, Indonesia: October 25 –November 7, 1993**

The First Round of Formal GRP-MNLF Peace Talks was held at Hotel Indonesia, a historic hotel, according to an Indonesian foreign affairs official, where many significant events had taken place. Here, the Indonesian Officials, led by Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, hosted the settlement of the Cambodian Conflict under the auspices of the United Nations.

The MNLF, arrived with the following twenty-three representatives:

1. Prof. Nur Misuari, Chairman, MNLF and Commander-In-Chief, Bangsamoro Armed Forces (BAF)
2. Lt. Gen. Muslimin Sema, Secretary General, MNLF
3. Ustadz Abdalbaki Abubakar, Secretary General for Foreign Affairs
4. Hatimil Hassan, Interim Vice-Chairman, MNLF Central Committee
5. Lt. Gen. Dr. Thambeyapha Manjoorsa, Chief of National Intelligence Service, (NIC) MNLF
6. Maj. Gen. Julhambrie Misuari, Chief, National Security Command, MNLF
7. Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chief of Military Intelligence Service, MNLF
8. Dr. Abdurahman U. Amin, Permanent Liaison Officer to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)
9. Ibrahim Omar, Chief of MNLF Information Committee
10. Ustadz Khabir Malik, MNLF Permanent Liaison Officer to the RABITA (World Muslim League)
11. Ustadz Habib Zain Jali, Chief, MNLF Civilian Relations Office
12. Reverend Absalom Cerveza, Representative of the Christian Sector in the Bangsamoro Homeland
13. Mr. Carlos Puntungan, Representative of the Lumad (Highlanders)
14. Maj. Gen. Punduma Sani, Cmdr. “Green Gothra” Task Force, MNLF
15. Maj. Gen. Kim Riga, Chairman, Autonomous State of Bukidnon
16. Dr. Mashur Jundam, Representative of Professional Sector

17. Mr. Abraham Iribani, MNLF Chairman's Chief Emissary on the GRP-OIC-MNLF Peace Process
18. Alhaj Mahaduni Hassan, Chief Liaison Officer of the MNLF Chairman's Office
19. Mahendra Madjilon, Chief Editor of MAHARDIKA, MNLF News Bulletin
20. Ustadz Hashim Adamin, Caretaker of MNLF Chairman's Office
21. Brig. Gen. Abu Amri Taddick, Deputy Secretary General, Military Affairs, MNLF
22. Atty. Didagen Dilangalen, Legal Consultant
23. Jamasali Abdurahman, Mass Media

The GRP Panel, headed by Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, former GRP Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Indonesia (retired in 1992), had the following eighteen members:

1. Hon. Eduardo Ermita, Vice Chairman, GRP Panel and Representative of the District of Batangas
2. Hon. Nur Jaafar, Adviser, GRP Panel and Representative of the District of Tawi-Tawi
3. Hon. Eusebio Abaquin, Adviser, GRP Panel and RP Ambassador to Indonesia
4. Hon. Nabil A. Tan, Member, GRP Panel and Vice Governor, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)
5. Hon. Sandiale A. Sambolawan, Member, GRP Panel and State Prosecutor, Department of Justice
6. Prof. Rudy B. Rodil, Member, GRP Panel and Professor-Historian, Iligan Institute of Technology
7. Hon. Feleciano Gacis, Technical Committee and Undersecretary, Department of National Defense
8. Mrs. Teresita De Castro, Technical Committee and Assistant Secretary, Department of Justice
9. Mr. Silvestre Afable, Technical Committee, GRP Panel
10. Dr. Patricia Lontoc, Executive Director, GRP Panel Secretariat
11. Ms. Hellen Barber, Technical Staff, GRP Secretariat
12. Ms. Embai Sambolawan, Technical Staff, GRP Secretariat
13. Maximino Maximo, Technical Staff, GRP Secretariat
14. Cesar Rayo, Technical Staff, GRP Secretariat
15. Nenet Sto. Domingo, Technical Staff, GRP Secretariat
16. Ms. Yolanda Recana, Technical Staff, GRP Secretariat

17. Ms. Gloria Tablico, Technical Staff, GRP Secretariat

18. Michael Macaraeg, Tehnical Staff, GRP Secretariat

The OIC was headed by the Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Hamid Algabid and had the following four members:

1. H.E. Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin, Assistant Secretary General for Muslim Communities and Legal Affairs, OIC
2. Mr. Nureddine Mezni, Director for Protocol, OIC
3. Dr. Ali Mustafa Zwawi, Director for Islamic Communities, OIC
4. Mr. Danial Fikri, MA, Professional Officer, OIC

Finally, the Indonesian Delegation, as host, was headed by H.E. Minister Ali Alatas and consisted of the following five members:

1. S. Wiryono, Director for Political Affairs
2. Pieter Damanik, Ambassador of Indonesia to the Philippines
3. Kusnadi Pudjiwinarto, Director for Asia and Pacific
4. Djamaris B. Suleman, Director for Africa and Middle East
5. N. Hassan Wirajuda, Director for International Organizations

## October 25: Opening Ceremonies

Since these were the first formal talks, the parties presented the basic principles and rationale for their participation in that historic meeting. In his opening address, Minister Alatas emphasized the following vital points:

- That “Indonesia has a real and tangible interest in the success of this peace process...the Philippines being an integral part of ASEAN.... The East ASEAN Growth Triangle...would never be fully realized without political stability and security being restored in the Southern Philippines.”
- That it is “a moral responsibility of Indonesia to assist in this effort as... the Indonesian Constitution...enjoins the Indonesian Government to contribute to the shaping of a world order of abiding peace and social justice...having...suffered our share of turmoil from internal dissension...we regard this problem with deepest understanding and the utmost sensitivity toward the views and positions held by either side.”
- That “the conflict in Southern Philippines...a problem of such complexity cannot be solved...in a single meeting...the primary efforts should rightfully reside with the Filipino leaders...Indonesia and OIC stand ready to contribute our share...if so desired.”

- That, as suggested in the Cipanas Meeting, “both sides [should] consider, as an initial step, agreeing on a cessation of armed hostilities...so as to create the necessary and conducive atmosphere of mutual confidence for the success of the substantive Talks.”
- That “the greatest human benefits and enjoyments have not been created by the exercise of an unbending will but are usually founded on compromise and mutual accommodation. Peace itself is very often the child of compromise...genuine negotiations always require a spirit of conciliation, mutual concessions and a commensurate political will to achieve a peaceful and just solution.”<sup>1</sup>

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference, H.E. Dr. Hamid Algabid, cited important points in his opening statements as follows:

- That the goal of the meeting was “to seek a just, lasting and honorable solution to a problem which concerns us all, a solution which would be based on mutual respect and observance of the higher interest of the Filipino people, as a major priority.”
- That, as for the leadership of H.E., President Fidel Ramos “has given rise to great expectations...[through] his determination to restore peace in the South...by granting it self-rule within the framework of national unity and the territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines...with the constant readiness of the MNLF to attain the same goal through dialogue and negotiations....”
- That the settlement of this problem would “enable the Muslims...to participate fully and contribute as they should, to the development and prosperity of their country on the one hand, and establish a fruitful and constructive cooperation between the OIC Member countries and the Republic of the Philippines, on the other hand.”
- That “the successful conclusion of this peace process...will fulfill our hopes and expectations and enable the Republic of the Philippines to devote its energy and resources to its national development while playing its traditional role within the family of nations.”<sup>2</sup>

H.E. Ambassador Manuel T. Yan headed the GRP Panel. In his opening statement, Ambassador Yan emphasized the following:<sup>3</sup>

- That “the Filipino struggle against colonialism and foreign domination...made us form a common destiny.... We forged a nation.”
- That “this nation is undivided...based upon a single sovereignty, a single national territory.... This is the overriding caveat of the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 which forms the starting point of our discussions.”

- That, “since the exploratory talks...the climate for peace has been nurtured by both sides.... President Ramos ordered an immediate stop to operations (in Basilan)... [and] the MNLF correspondingly took reciprocal action.”
- That the problem could be resolved through sincere and constructive negotiations as suggested by the OIC in the Cipanas Meeting
- That “the principle of a single sovereignty and national territory must...give rise to the framework of a single constitution, as affirmed by Section 16 of the Tripoli Agreement.”
- That Yan’s people agreed with the MNLF that “before anything else, we must seek a political solution to the problem...we must find a solution that will not come in a form of imposition to any parties.”
- That, as the President had said, “we must try to find peace that is principled, lasting, with neither blame nor surrender for either side, with dignity for all concerned.”

On his part, the MNLF Chairman emphasized that the Formal Talks in Jakarta were marked by a powerful sense of urgency and were crucial for the MNLF’s quest for peace, justice and freedom.<sup>4</sup> He recounted the beginnings of the MNLF who “had to literally grope in the dark.... Young and inexperienced...we thought that...the only way out of this predicament was to resort to the arbitration of armed struggle and [to] restore our people’s national freedom, sovereignty and independence...”

The MNLF Chairman also reviewed the progress of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks since the issuance of the “famous Kuala Lumpur Resolution of the OIC in 1974, which called upon the two warring parties to resolve their problem peacefully through an honorable political solution.” This led to the series of meetings between the MNLF and GRP with the participation of the OIC that finally led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement.

He then emphasized the need to achieve full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit as a pre-requisite for peace, and that there should be no attempt to amend the Agreement’s salient provisions. “The task of the Formal Talks is to deliberate on an agenda which would focus on the modalities for the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement to include those portions of the Agreement left for further discussions and the transitional implementing structure and mechanism.”

Chairman Misuari also expressed his belief that giving peace to

Mindanao would be tantamount to delivering peace to the entire Filipino nation, and that through peace both parties could finally work together towards economic progress and prosperity.<sup>5</sup>

This historic event was well covered by the Jakarta media. The following day, *The Jakarta Post* reported that: "Failure of talk will result in war, MNLF leader says... Peace shall be possible only through the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement...as any deviation from this provision could only but rear the specter of war."<sup>6</sup>

The GRP Panel Ambassador Manuel Yan was quoted by the Jakarta Post in his opening speech as saying, "the overriding caveat of the accord was that the negotiations were based upon a single sovereignty, a single national territory."<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Indonesian Minister Alatas was quoted to have floated the idea of compromise, "Genuine negotiations always require a spirit of conciliation, mutual concessions and commensurate political will to achieve a peaceful and just solution."<sup>8</sup> The OIC Secretary General Hamid Algabid was reported to have maintained the OIC stand of "devising adequate and effective modalities" for the realization of the Tripoli Agreement.<sup>9</sup>

### October 26: First Session

The session was chaired by H. E. Ambassador S. Wiryono as representative of the host country, the Government of Indonesia, also in his capacity as Chairman and one of the representatives of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six.

He opened the session at 9:30 AM by stating that the agenda would "focus on the modalities for the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit, to include: A. Those portions of the Agreement left for further or later discussions; and B. Transitional implementing structure and mechanism."<sup>10</sup>

In reply, H. E. Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman of the GRP Panel, presented two working papers: "The Proposed Detailed Agenda Items for the Formal Talks" and "The Proposed Agenda Arrangement for the Formal Talks based on the Tripoli Agreement."

Chairman Misuari moved to request clarification about the nature of the mandate of the GRP Panel as he underscored the need for the reactivation of the Mixed Committee (as called for in the Tripoli Agreement). He rejected the application of Philippine laws and

constitution, arguing that the Tripoli Agreement was a binding international agreement, which in international practice was above the competence of domestic law including the Philippine constitution.<sup>11</sup>

Amb. Yan replied by saying that his Panel had the “full mandate from President Ramos to hold formal talks with the MNLF in order to implement the Tripoli Agreement within the context of the Philippine Constitution and the laws as part of the Philippine National Comprehensive Peace Program.”<sup>12</sup> He referred to Article III, paragraph 16 of the Tripoli Agreement, which in the Philippines’ view requires that the implementation of the Agreement be in accord with the Philippine Constitution. He stated that the Philippines was seeking to return the MNLF to mainstream Philippine politics, to create a condition of peace and security, and to achieve the comprehensive settlement of the Muslim problem in the Southern Philippines.<sup>13</sup>

In response, Chairman Misuari clarified the MNLF position that the task before the Peace Panels was to work out the modalities for the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit as mandated in the Cipanas Statement of Understanding. Another goal was to include those portions of the Tripoli Agreement left for further discussion and transitional implementing structure and mechanism, meaning the establishment of a provisional government in the areas of autonomy. He further argued that failure to set up the Mixed Committee would be tantamount to deviation from the Tripoli Agreement.<sup>14</sup>

This exchange of arguments between Ambassador Yan and Chairman Misuari prompted Ambassador Muhammad Mohsin, OIC Assistant Secretary General for Muslim Communities and Minorities and Legal Affairs to inquire about the status of the talks.

Amb. Yan replied, “The mandate of the GRP Peace Panel is to hold formal peace talks with the MNLF and not to function as a Mixed Committee. The GRP Peace Panel will have to consult with the President if it can be transformed to function as Mixed Committee.”<sup>15</sup> The Mixed Committee is provided in Article III paragraph 11 of the Tripoli Agreement, which says,

A Mixed Committee shall be composed of representatives of the Central Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the representatives of

the Moro National Liberation Front. The mixed Committee shall meet in Tripoli during the period from the Fifth of February to a date not later than the Third of March 1977. The...said Committee shall be charged to study in detail the points left for further discussion in order to reach a solution thereof in conformity with the provisions of this agreement.<sup>16</sup>

The Committee met in Manila as scheduled but failed to reach any consensus until the talks collapsed in October 1977.

The Chairman of the Plenary, Ambassador S. Wiryono of Indonesia, sensing a heated exchange of views on the issue, suggested that the question of the Mixed Committee be put on hold. He moved for the creation of the Joint Secretariat as called for in the Cipanas Statement of Understanding.<sup>17</sup>

I was nominated by the MNLF Chairman to head the MNLF Representatives to the Joint Secretariat with Atty. Didagen Delangalen, Rev. Absalom Cerveza and Dr. Mashour Jundam as members.

Meanwhile, Dr. Patricia Lontoc, Executive Director of the GRP Panel Secretariat, headed the GRP Representative with Atty. Teresita De Castro, Mr. Silvestre Afable and Ms. Hellen Barber as members. Dr. Hassan Wirajuda of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia was appointed as Chairman.<sup>18</sup>

The session adjourned at 11:15 AM with the mandate that the Joint Secretariat was to categorize the detailed agenda items for submission to the Panel for approval.

During the first meeting of the Joint Secretariat, the GRP Representatives submitted for discussion the two GRP working papers. The paper emphasized the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) established under R. A. No. 6734, and was accompanied by another paper entitled "Proposed Agenda Arrangement" outlining the stages of discussion.

"After some deliberations and exchange of views in the spirit of conciliation"<sup>19</sup>, the first session of the Joint Secretariat came up with the following principles:

- That the Agenda should be based on section 14 of the Cipanas Statement of Understanding; and
- That we should proceed from the least contentious issues progressing to the more contentious ones.



The Joint Secretariat also came up with the following agenda items derived from the Tripoli Agreement:

1. National Defense (Article III, Par. 2)
2. Education (Article III, Par. 4)
3. Administrative System (Article III, Par. 5)
4. Economic and Financial System (Article III, Par. 6)
5. Regional Security Force (Article III, Par. 8)
6. Representation in National Government (Article III Par. 7)
7. Legislative Assembly and Executive Council (Article III, Par. 9)
8. Mines and Minerals (Article III, Par. 10)

### October 26: Second Session

Ambassador Wiryono opened the session at 3:20 PM by reporting the results of the deliberations of the Joint Secretariat, citing the eight agenda items.

The MNLF Panel said that the list was exhaustive. The GRP Panel responded by saying that the eight agenda items “were starting points for discussion chosen since they were deemed to be relatively less contentious and the remaining issues as contained in the Tripoli Agreement would also be subject to later discussion.”<sup>20</sup> They concluded by saying that “the GRP Panel is mandated to discuss more than the said eight items pursuant to the authority granted to it by the President...and as provided in... the Cipanas Statement of Understanding.”<sup>21</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin then invited the GRP Peace Panel to clarify its position on the Tripoli Agreement, especially on the question of autonomy. He drew the GRP Panel’s attention to the apparent differing Philippine interpretations of the meaning of autonomy over time. He drew attention to the difference in perception of autonomy by Mindanao people, autonomy as offered by the Marcos Government, and the autonomy provisions as stipulated in the 1987 Constitution of President Aquino. He expressed hopes that for the sake of peace and prosperity of the Philippines, the Government of President Ramos would soon introduce autonomy in the South by implementing the Tripoli Agreement fully both in letter and spirit.<sup>22</sup>

Ambassador Yan then argued that the rights and obligations under

the Tripoli Agreement were not self-executory. The government had carried out various steps to implement the Tripoli Agreement in accordance with the Philippine Constitution, for example the holding of the plebiscite and the creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Yan emphasized that the GRP must abide by the constitutional process mandating submission to the will of the sovereign people which had been there all the time whether during the tenures of President Marcos, President Aquino or the incumbent President Ramos.”<sup>23</sup>

Chairman Misuari countered this statement by reiterating the MNLF position that rejects the applicability of the Philippine Constitution and laws regarding the settlement of the problem in the Southern Philippines. He also questioned the fairness of the plebiscite organized by the Philippine Government in 1989.<sup>24</sup>

In response, Ambassador Yan cited statistical data from the official records of the Commission on Election on the result of the plebiscite for the ARMM.<sup>25</sup> According to that data, the four Muslim dominated provinces (Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur) had voted overwhelmingly in favor of the ARMM.

The exchange of arguments between the MNLF and GRP Panels became so intense that the Chair (Ambassador Wiryono of Indonesia) had to remind them to turn their attention to the eight agenda items and that both parties had committed to the Tripoli Agreement and the Capanas Statement of Understanding.

Chairman Misuari did not allow the issue to pass, however, without making a stinging rebuke of the GRP arguments. He expressed his concerns against what he believed was an attempt to reinterpret the Tripoli Agreement. Then, he read excerpts from a paper believed to have been prepared for Senator Mercado. The paper “confirmed the validity of the Tripoli Agreement and argued that the ‘constitutional process’ referred to in the said Agreement should not be construed as ‘conditions’, but as a ‘means’ towards the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement.”<sup>26</sup>

It was at this point of the exchange of arguments that the moderator, Ambassador Wiryono, suggested to shift the discussion to the issue of ceasefire as a confidence-building measure, to which the GRP Panel agreed.

The MNLF Panel, while recognizing the importance of a ceasefire,

also underlined the need for mutual restraint in the field. They narrated the MNLF's sad experience involving the 1977 Ceasefire agreement with then President Marcos, an agreement that they believed Marcos had used as a cover to advance AFP forces in order to gain ground in MNLF areas. To the MNLF, President Marcos's maneuvers were deliberate ones, designed to scuttle the talks and destroy the MNLF military structures.

After this discussion, the session adjourned at 6:30 PM with a consensus on the following:

1. The establishment of the Joint Secretariat
2. The discussion of the eight items of the agenda as the less contentious items to be taken up, ahead of the more difficult ones

After the first two sessions, it was evident that the positions of the two parties were still poles apart even on the matter of confidence-building measures. The GRP insisted on constitutional process while the MNLF continued to reject the idea and remained belligerent. Only upon the suggestions of the Chair did the parties agree to come up with the Joint Secretariat and the eight agenda items for discussion. Even the suggestion from the Chair to table the issue on ceasefire was responded to with caution by the MNLF.

As the MNLF Emissary, I provided the legal paper presented by Chairman Misuari. This paper was written by Atty. Soliman M. Santos, Jr., head of the legislative staff of Senator Mercado who was serving as Adviser to the GRP Panel, though the latter was not around to comment on the paper. Atty. Santos gave me the legal paper before my departure for Jakarta. Atty. Santos specified that the paper contained his personal view of the subject and did not state that a copy was given to Senator Mercado or was issued in the name of the latter's office. He requested that I not reveal his involvement in writing the paper in any formal forum although he signed his name on it. I gave the paper to the MNLF Chairman with the same advice. However, in the middle of those heated discussions between Ambassador Yan and Chairman Misuari, the latter became carried away by his emotions and referred to the paper in order to support his arguments against GRP's firm position on "constitutional process."

*Hopes in Jakarta.* The negotiations soon became a concern of the highest level of authority in the Jakarta Government. No less than

President Suharto was quoted by the OIC Secretary General Dr. Hamid Algabid as having “reminded the secessionist Moro front and the Philippine delegation at peace talks here that a complete solution to their conflict is crucial for regional stability.”<sup>27</sup> *The Jakarta Post* quoted Dr. Algabid as referring to President Suharto’s assurance that “Indonesia would do its utmost to secure a lasting settlement of the Moro problem.”<sup>28</sup> *The Indonesia Times* reported that “President Suharto has expressed the hope that talks now going on here between the Philippine Government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) will be successful and thus help ensure the continuity of the Philippines’ development effort.”<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Algabid was confident in Indonesia, saying, that the OIC would leave it to Indonesia to help solve the problem, as the country “has a good track record in mediating regional conflicts, including the problem of Cambodia.”<sup>30</sup> He expressed hope that the two parties would be able to come to a mutually beneficial solution.

Local leaders in Jakarta also expressed their hopes for a peaceful resolution of the Moro problem. “I call on both parties to compromise. It is the best solution, otherwise it is the people who will go on suffering...Jakarta is the best place for a peaceful solution, so please reach it here,” said Lukman Harun, a top official of the Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesia.<sup>3131</sup> Ibid.

Chalid Mawardi of the *Nahdatul Ulama*, another big organization in Indonesia shared the view that “violence is not a solution.”

### October 27: Third Session

After the Chair opened the session at 11:10 AM, Ambassador Yan made a statement; he expressed his hope that the proceedings would be marked by a spirit of reconciliation and appealed for greater prudence. He also read the GRP note describing the latter’s sentiment regarding the remarks made by Chairman Misuari in the previous session and reported that Senator Mercado had denied the validity of the paper<sup>32</sup> presented earlier by the former. Chairman Misuari responded by calling on me to be recognized by the Plenary as an MNLF official operating in Manila who was given the legal paper.

Later in the evening, Senator Mercado arrived. A meeting was

arranged with Chairman Misuari, and Congressman Ermita joined the two. The meeting ended in a very friendly manner, and even added to the positive confidence between the two parties. Chairman Misuari revealed later that the controversy that arose out of his presentation of that paper even brought the two parties closer. Both men even recalled their days in the University of the Philippines in the 1960s where they were involved in student movements that later turned into a nationwide uprising against the Marcos Government.

Regarding Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman Misuari would later on tell selected leaders of the MNLF that he sometimes thought that the latter was overbearing in his handling of the discussion. He said that Ambassador Yan would allow him to say his piece without any response, but would keep reiterating the GRP position without showing any sign of emotion.

In contrast, the Chair, Ambassador Wiryono, was very professional and diplomatic in his handling of the discussion. When the exchange of arguments reached a high pitch, he would either call the attention of the parties to the agenda on the table or call for a “coffee break” to give the parties a cooling-off period. During these breaks, one party could approach the other to resolve sensitive issues were either resolved or to agree not to discuss the issue again for the time being.

At the suggestion of the Chair, the subject was brought back to the eight agenda items on the table. Ambassador Wiryono read the first item in the agenda, National Defense, which said:

The National Defense Affairs shall be the concern of Central authority provided that the arrangements for the joining of the forces of the Moro National Liberation Front with the Philippine Armed Forces be discussed later.”<sup>33</sup>

Ambassador Yan then presented a non-paper containing a GRP proposal on National Defense described in detail by Undersecretary of Defense Feliciano Gacis, particularly point three regarding the possible deployment or assignment of the MNLF Forces who might join the AFP within the Autonomous Region.<sup>34</sup>

Responding to the GRP presentation, Chairman Misuari said that the implementation of Article III, paragraph 2 of the Tripoli Agreement must be related to Article III, paragraph 8 of the agreement on Special Regional Security Forces. He proposed that a predetermined percentage within the Armed Forces of the Philippines

(AFP) be designated for Bangsamoro Armed Forces (BAF), or that representation of the BAF in the AFP be based on a quota system to be drawn from the BAF.<sup>35</sup>

Chairman Misuari further explained that the proposed Regional Security Forces would be responsible for all affairs relating to security, maintenance of peace and order within the Autonomous Region, and threats from the outside, and did not preclude the possibility of a request for assistance from the AFP in case of emergency.<sup>36</sup>

After Undersecretary Gacis of the GRP Panel raised some questions for clarification, the Chair identified a number of issues still left for discussion on the issue of National Defense and invited the Panels to nominate members to the Working Committee on National Defense to continue the discussion. The session adjourned at 1 PM.

### **October 27: Fourth Session**

The session started at 2:40 PM. At the initiatives of Ambassador Wiryono, the Peace Panels decided to cluster the agenda items, except for education, which remained separate at the suggestion of Chairman Misuari.

Ambassador Wiryono read the specific provision of the agreement on education in the Tripoli Agreement, which said:

Authorities of the Autonomy in the South of the Philippine shall have the right to set up schools, colleges and universities, provided that matters pertaining to the relationship between these education and scientific organs and the general education system in the State shall be the subject of discussion later on.<sup>37</sup>

Chairman Misuari asserted that the educational system of the Region must be in harmony with that of the State in order to avoid conflict.

Ambassador Yan in turn submitted a non-paper outlining the position of the GRP on the issue of education. Chairman Misuari responded by saying that he saw no basic difficulties with the GRP non-paper, pointing out that most of the MNLF educators were, after all, educated in Philippine Institutions and therefore a meeting of the minds among them would not be difficult to reach. He noted that since Islamic schools already existed in the Bangsamoro Homeland, it was just a matter of recognizing their existence and

placing them under the jurisdiction and management of the Autonomous Government.<sup>38</sup>

Ambassador Wiryono, who submitted a non-paper of the GRP Panel on the next subject, proceeded to this next item, the Administrative System, stating that:

The Muslims shall have their own administrative system in compliance with the objectives of autonomy and its institutions. The relationship between this administrative system and the Central Administrative System [is] to be discussed later.<sup>39</sup>

Chairman Misuari responded by saying that an administrative system must be embodied in a code, and this code must be enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Government which should be formed first before it is empowered with the responsibility to produce such a code.<sup>40</sup>

Ambassador Yan proposed that the non-paper on administrative system submitted by his delegation be considered by the working committee in their deliberations and reflected in the final agreement. He then went on to present the position of the GRP from this non-paper. He stated that these points were incorporated in the Organic Act, and while it would be desirable to embody them in the Administrative Code, such a step would require a considerable longer time to prepare.<sup>41</sup>

Ambassador Wiryono then moved on to the agenda item on Economic and Financial System and cited the provision as follows:

The authorities of the autonomy in the South of the Philippine shall have their own economic and financial system. The relationship between this system and the Central Economic and financial system of the state shall be discussed later.<sup>42</sup>

In response to this agenda item, Chairman Misuari expressed the view that the main question involved determining the relationship between the regional and the national systems. He pointed out that the system adopted by the Autonomous Government would adhere to free-market economy but would also have to reflect the cultural and ideological bent of the people living in the region, while keeping harmony with the national economic system. He illustrated that in the Islamic tradition, banking system did not charge *riba* (interest). Thus, the system applied in the Autonomous Region should reflect this.<sup>43</sup>

Ambassador Yan presented and read a GRP non-paper on economic and financial system, important points of which were the following:

Consistent with the constitution and national policies, the regional government may enact regional laws pertaining to the national economy and patrimony applicable and responsive to the needs of the region. However, nothing herein shall be construed as to authorize the regional government to require lesser standard respecting the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural resources than those required by the national government.<sup>44</sup>

Chairman Misuari replied by saying that with regard to taxation, in Islam, there is the concept of *Zakat* as governed by *Shari'ah*. *Zakat* would apply only to Muslims. He also suggested that experts in the working committee be invited to Saudi Arabia and other countries to draw from the experiences of the Islamic Banks there in order to enrich their deliberations.<sup>45</sup>

Ambassador Yan concurred with the idea of forming a separate Joint Working Committee but mentioned that there are experts in Manila who could assist the Joint Working Committee.<sup>46</sup>

After an exchange of views between the two Panels, the Chair declared that the agenda item, Economic and Financial System, had been decided upon. The session adjourned at 3:00 PM.

### October 28: Fifth Session

Ambassador Wiryono opened the session at 10:30 AM by reading the next agenda item:

Mines and mineral resources fall within the competence of the Central Government, and a reasonable percentage deriving from the revenues of the mines and mineral be fixed for the benefit of the area of the autonomy.

<sup>47</sup>

With regard to this agenda item, Chairman Misuari said that the main challenge before the Peace Panels was to determine the sharing system for revenues accruing from mines and minerals. He referred to examples where dissatisfaction with the manner in which resources were shared had exacerbated the political situation. Referring to the need to pay heed to the principles of human and social justice, Chairman Misuari identified three pertinent factors in considering the sharing system for mines and minerals:<sup>48</sup>



1. Mines and minerals embedded in the proposed autonomous region should be distributed in favor of the region's populace;
2. There was a need for major reconstruction in the Autonomous Region in view of the wholesale destruction and ravages of a quarter of century of war; and
3. The newly established Autonomous Region needed to receive maximum and all-round support, in particular, given the threat likely to face from the communist insurgency and the rightist group and other groups operating within and around the neighboring area.

Ambassador Yan, in response, briefed the Peace Panels on the steps taken by the Administration of President Ramos to deal with the various agencies affecting the nation. He submitted a document, Executive Order No. 125, entitled *Defining the Approach and Administrative Structure for Government's Comprehensive Peace Efforts*.<sup>49</sup> He also expressed the view that the issue of the sharing of revenues accruing from mines and minerals was within the competence of technical experts. He referred to the Tripoli Agreement and the Organic Act, which he believed, assured any prospective autonomous authority of its due share of revenues from mines and minerals.<sup>50</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin, responding to the question raised by Ambassador Wiryono, defined "reasonable percentage" as any sharing arrangement that would have to take into account the needs of the Autonomous Area that had suffered from the ravages of war.<sup>51</sup>

Chairman Misuari further explained that in addition to being "reasonable" such an arrangement would have to be both "fair" and "just". He mentioned the word *kaadilan*, a term derived from Arabic and Bahasa Indonesia for "justice". He believed that a greater share should be accorded to the people of the Autonomous Region, particularly to those who needed the revenue most, and to those who have suffered from the ravages of war.<sup>52</sup>

Ambassador Yan responded by saying that oil and minerals were not only sources of funds for the Autonomous Government but also for the other provinces of the Philippines.<sup>53</sup>

Chairman Misuari underlined the need not only for the sharing of revenues but also for a joint approach in determining mines and mineral exploration. He further stated that there should not be any monopoly on mines and mineral exploration on the part of the

national government.<sup>54</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin expressed the view that given the Philippines' unitary constitution, the country should not fear that a prospective revenue-sharing arrangement might encourage other regions to make similar demands. He also expressed the OIC's readiness to undertake a study of a possible revenue-sharing arrangement.<sup>55</sup>

Ambassador Yan welcomed any technical advice from the OIC. He also reiterated that a working committee on mines and minerals should tap experts from the Philippines Department of Energy to find a reasonable revenue-sharing arrangement.<sup>56</sup>

Chairman Misuari then proposed the establishment of a joint working committee on mines and minerals to be composed of GRP, MNLF and representatives of the OIC like the other joint committee to further study the matter.<sup>57</sup>

The Peace Panels agreed to form the Joint Working Committee on Mines and Minerals similar to the other working committees.<sup>58</sup>

Ambassador Wiryono then read the next agenda item, which was the Legislative and Executive Councils:

Legislative Assembly and an Executive Council shall be formed in the areas of the Autonomy for the Muslims in the South of the Philippines. The setting up of the Legislative Assembly shall be constituted through a direct election, and the formation of the Executive Council shall take place through appointments by the Legislative Assembly. A decree for their formation shall be enacted by the President of the Republic respectively. The number of members of each assembly shall be determined later on.<sup>59</sup>

Chairman Misuari took note of existing Philippine Laws referred to by Ambassador Yan and gave an overview of the consultative Islamic democratic principles, which applied within the MNLF. He suggested that the issue of the number of representatives in the Legislative Assembly be discussed by the respective assemblies in the General Meeting (GM). He called for a formula which would allow for changing demographic pattern in the propose Autonomous Region. He further suggested the possibility of sectoral representation in the Legislative Assembly appointed by the "Chief Minister" of the Autonomous Region, representing for example, youth and women.<sup>60</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin identified a possible incompatibility between Section 18 of the Philippine Constitution concerning the so-called

Organic Act and the Legislative Assembly as envisaged in the Tripoli Agreement. He raised the possibility of an amendment by the Philippine Government to the relevant section of the Constitution. He further saw the need to discuss the question of an interim government in the region by the MNLF, which was already recognized as the sole representative of the Southern Philippines, so as to undertake necessary preparation for the holding of elections to the Legislative Assembly. He expressed the view that the principle of representation of the Autonomous Region in Legislative, Executive (e.g. Presidential Cabinet) and the Judicial Organs of the National Government should be accepted. He added that, keeping in view the overall neglect and dereliction they suffered over the decades, the establishment of adequate quotas in various civil departments and national armed forces for the people of the Autonomous Region ought to be given special consideration.<sup>61</sup>

Chairman Misuari gave assurance that the interest of the non-Muslim population of the Autonomous Region would be protected by law.<sup>62</sup>

The Panels agreed to establish a working committee on Legislative Assembly and Executive Council to examine the matter further. The session adjourned at 12:55 noontime.

### **October 28: Sixth Session**

Ambassador Wiryono opened the session at 3:25 PM by inviting the Panels to begin discussion of the issue of Representation in National Government with the provision as follows:

The authorities of the autonomy in the South of the Philippines shall enjoy the right of representation and participation in the Central Government and in all other organs of the State. The number of representatives and ways or participation shall be fixed later.<sup>63</sup>

During his opening statements, Chairman Misuari underscored the importance of democratic representation in ensuring the unity of the nation. He called for Bangsamoro representation and participation in the executive, legislative and judicial and other branches of the Central Government and saw the need to adopt a formula that would ensure such representation. He stressed that unless there was just representation, the people of the Philippines

might go through the same experience as that of the American people centuries ago. He recalled that lack of representation was part of the cause of the struggle of the thirteen colonies to declare their independence from the motherland, Great Britain.<sup>64</sup>

In response, Ambassador Yan said that the Philippines had always sought to ensure fair representation in the various branches of government by people from the southern Philippines. He also mentioned that, at present, Muslim Filipinos had been appointed at all branches and levels of government based on the qualification for the position, citing statistical data to validate his claim.<sup>65</sup>

Chairman Misuari then proposed the creation of a Ministry for the Autonomous Region in the Philippines and the reorganization of the Cabinet with a view to the creation of the said Ministry to be manned by representatives of the Autonomous Region recommended by the "Chief Minister".<sup>66</sup>

Ambassador Yan received the suggestion of Chairman Misuari positively and pointed to President Ramos's special attention to the situation in Southern Philippines and his Administration's plan to encourage economic growth in the area through a Southern Philippines-East Indonesia-East Malaysia Economic Triangle; and to make Mindanao the "front-door" of the Philippines. He pointed to the recent introduction of a direct flight connecting Menado and Davao as evidence of the move in this direction. He also mentioned the existence of the Office of Muslim Affairs under the Office of the President.<sup>67</sup>

Chairman Misuari welcomed President Ramos's initiatives to improve the social and economic conditions in Southern Philippines, more specifically his reference to Mindanao as the "front door" of the Philippines. He expressed confidence that given Southern Philippines' past importance as a maritime route for major tankers, Mindanao could be seen as the "front door" to Asia and the world as well.<sup>68</sup>

The parties then proceeded to create Support Committees with their respective Chairmen and members from both parties to be chaired by representatives from the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six. I was nominated by the MNLF Chairman to head Support Committee #3 (Economics and Financial Systems). A separate Committee was also created to tackle the issue of ceasefire. The session

adjourned at 4:30 PM.

From October 29, 30 and 31, or Days 5, 6, and 7, only the Joint Secretariat met in three sessions to prepare the draft of the minutes of the proceedings from the beginning. The Peace Panels went on a recess.

On October 29, the MNLF Panel was brought to the *Istiklal* Mosque, the biggest mosque in Jakarta for the Friday prayer. There, our delegation was cheered, and the Indonesians embraced the MNLF Chairman like he was their own. There was a high sense of Islamic brotherhood and solidarity between the Indonesians and the Moros displayed in that *Jumaa* prayer. The Indonesians called us “Moro”, their popular term for Muslims living in the Philippines and fighting for their rights against the government. Even when I went to the bazaars and shopping centers and introduced myself as Muslim from the Philippines, they called me “Moro”.

At 6:30 PM of the same day, the MNLF delegation, as part of confidence building, attended the cocktails hosted by the GRP Panel at the Mandarin Oriental, a five-star Hotel in Jakarta. The GRP Panel tried to open up as well as to get as close as possible to MNLF Panel members. At 8:00 PM, we proceeded to another function room where Ms. Loren Legarda and her husband, former Governor Tony Leviste, hosted a dinner for the GRP and MNLF delegations. The occasion was actually a cultural event as most of us were wearing native costumes. It was a light moment for the negotiators that just came out from a long and heated debate on the issue of peace in Mindanao.

### November 1: Seventh Session

Ambassador Wiryono opened the session at 9:45 AM by identifying four tasks of the plenary:

1. To review the summary report produced by the Joint Secretariat;
2. To follow up on point 14 B on the Cipanas Understanding, namely, to determine the modalities for the “transitional implementing structure and mechanism”;
3. To decide on the final documents that would be produced by the Formal Talks; and
4. To give the Joint Press Statement.

At this juncture, Ambassador Yan informed the Peace Panels that

he had received instructions from President Ramos regarding the proposal that the Peace Panels form a Mixed Committee as proposed by Chairman Misuari. Ambassador Yan said that the GRP Panel was not authorized to constitute itself jointly with the MNLF as the "Mixed Committee" since the GRP panel's task was not merely to discuss the items left "for further discussion" in the Tripoli Agreement, but to negotiate the full range of issues proceeding from the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit. The GRP panel, however, was authorized to designate initial membership to the joint working committees under the umbrella of the mixed committee which would consider the eight initial agenda items during the present meeting and continue its work in the Philippines, in order to avail themselves of more extensive technical advice and data from, various agencies of the Philippine Government.<sup>69</sup>

After several positive exchanges of views between the two Panels, Ambassador Wiryono expressed his impression that confidence had built up.<sup>70</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin then requested that a verbatim record of the Formal Talks be kept. He also raised the need to start formulating in a formal document the outcome of the Formal Talks; it could be called a "Joint Statement of Understanding" or Protocol of Agreement."<sup>71</sup>

Chairman Misuari agreed, pointing out that the whole world was watching the Peace Talks and that, therefore, a positive statement needed to be worked out. He suggested that the document be named "Protocol of Agreement."<sup>72</sup>

After a briefing was made by Dr. Hassan Wirajuda on the Joint Secretariat's preparation of the Summary Records of the Formal Talks which they did in four sessions, the Peace Panels agreed to the following title for the record of the proceedings: "*Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the Formal Talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front with the participation of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General.*" The Chair adjourned the meeting at 12:15 noontime.

## November 1: Eighth Session

This session was devoted to the review of the draft summary record of proceedings as prepared by the Joint Secretariat.

## November 2: Ninth Session

This session was devoted to discussions on the clustering of the agenda items, administrative requirements of the meetings, time frame, and the need for a good plan to ensure success of the meetings.

Ambassador Wiryono reviewed the points of agreements. First, the joint committees were renamed “support committees” and clustered into four; a list of the members of these support committees would be subsequently provided. The support committees would meet at two cities: Manila and Zamboanga City, four weeks after the conclusion of the current Formal Talks. Second, adequate communication and transportation facilities, as well as security guarantees at sites of the support committee meetings, were deemed necessary. Third, the need to establish a communication line linking Jeddah-Jakarta-Manila to handle the various documents was expressed. The Peace Panels agreed that the Indonesian Embassy in Manila would serve as a contact point for this purpose. Fourth, in relation to the media, it was agreed that the meetings of the support committee would be closed to the media.<sup>73</sup>

Chairman Misuari reminded the body of the importance of the media in creating public impressions of the progress of the Formal Talks. He suggested that unless otherwise decided, the meetings of the mixed committee should be as transparent as possible.<sup>74</sup>

At this point Ambassador Yan read out a statement from President Fidel V. Ramos, dated November 1, 1993, on the Peace Talks in which he expressed pleasure that the negotiations had progressed in an atmosphere of cordiality and mutuality and that he would “do everything possible to move the negotiations to a higher level consistent with Philippine national sovereignty and territorial integrity under the Constitution.” President Ramos also expressed his confidence that while fundamental differences still confronted the two panels, good will and a firm resolve to reach a just and honorable solution could overcome such obstacles.

Ambassador Wiryono welcomed the statement of President Ramos, as did the OIC officials. MNLF Chairman Misuari expressed his appreciation for the statement and added that the statement was the impetus to accelerate the pace of the current talks.

This positive point in the discussion was followed by another exchange of arguments on the issue of constitutional process on the establishment of the Provisional Government. Chairman Misuari at one point expressed the view that anything not within the ambit of the Tripoli Agreement should be eliminated from the list of proposed agenda items for the Formal Talks submitted by the GRP Panel. He underscored that the Tripoli Agreement was a final document and, with the exception of those paragraphs under Article III, which clearly requires further discussions, the Tripoli Agreement was beyond the competence of the present body.<sup>75</sup>

Ambassador Wiryono had to remind the two parties of the basis of the current peace talks: first, the Tripoli Agreement which referred to the formation of the Mixed Committee, and second, following various developments, the Cipanas Statement of Understanding, in line with the Tripoli Agreement, which identified points left for further discussion as reflected in paragraph 14 a and b of the former. These, he said, were actually the same guidance. Thus, he expressed the hope that there would not be any controversy on this point. By virtue of the Tripoli Agreement the parties were in Jakarta as a Mixed Committee; however, by virtue of the Cipanas Statement of Understanding the parties were also in Jakarta to negotiate points left for discussion. There was no inconsistency, therefore.<sup>76</sup>

On the issue of constitutional process, Chairman Misuari re-emphasized the MNLF position that none of the provisions of the Philippine law or constitution could override the Tripoli Agreement, which was an international agreement, and beyond the competence of the Philippine constitution and the domestic law, unless so indicated.<sup>77</sup>

The session adjourned at 1PM and resumed at 3:35 PM. At the suggestion of Chairman Misuari, the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> session was devoted to discussion on *Sharia'h* Court. He admitted that the Philippine authorities had already instituted such a Court; there was already the Code of Muslim Personal Laws, which showed that the Philippine government was making certain efforts. However, in the



MNLF view, there remained room for improvement. He identified a need for greater Muslim representation in the Philippine Supreme Court and Court of Appeals. In addition, he felt that the *Sharia'h* Court should have superior *Shariah'* Court for the Autonomous Region.<sup>78</sup>

In response, Ambassador Yan gave an account of the various steps taken by the GRP in complying with the provision of Article III, paragraph 3 of the Tripoli Agreement, citing the Muslims who had been appointed to the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals based on their merits. He invited Ms. Teresita de Castro, a member of the GRP Panel from the Department of Justice, to explain the procedure for the appointment of Judges and Justices in the Philippines. Ms. De Castro explained that the Judicial and Bar Council submits to the President nominations to the Judiciary, pursuant to Section 9, Article VIII of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and that qualifications for Judges and Justices are provided in the Philippine Constitution and laws.<sup>79</sup>

After the discussion on *Sharia'h*, Ambassador Wiryono invited comments on the issues of the Provisional Government and constitutional processes. It was noted that the Tripoli Agreement states that:

Immediately after the signature of the Agreement in Manila, a Provisional Government shall be established in the areas of the autonomy to be appointed by the President of the Philippines; and be charged with the task of preparing for the elections of the Legislative Assembly in the territories of the Autonomy; and administer the areas in accordance with the provisions of this agreement until a Government is formed by the elected Legislative Assembly.<sup>80</sup>

Ambassador Yan responded by saying that in the intervening years since the signing of the Tripoli Agreement, a number of developments had taken place that had altered the legal framework and the political landscape in the Philippines. He introduced into the discussion the entire Republic Act 6734 and proposed that the said organic act be placed side-by-side with the MNLF concept of the transitional implementing structure and mechanism so that the matter could be addressed to their mutual satisfaction. He also stated that RA 6734 was a product of a long period of constitutional, legislative and democratic processes that could not be reversed arbitrarily. If a new set-up was desired, it had to start from the existing structure created

by the said law. He further emphasized that the GRP did not wish to violate the letter and spirit of the Tripoli Agreement and noted that the MNLF Panel had accepted them as a framework for further discussion by the Joint Technical Working Committee groups.<sup>81</sup>

Again, Chairman Misuari reiterated the MNLF position regarding the fact that Organic Act 6734 was not in accordance with the Tripoli Agreement. He requested that lawyers and jurists in the Autonomous Region be allowed to consult their counterparts in the national government based on mutuality of interest and understanding.<sup>82</sup>

On the other hand, OIC Assistant Secretary General Ambassador Mohsin identified positive elements from the statements of Ambassador Yan, the willingness of the GRP to “improve” the Republic Act 6734. He further referred to the message of President Ramos that gave added impetus to the Formal Talks.<sup>83</sup> Ambassador Rajab also admitted that he was encouraged by the GRP willingness to improve the existing autonomy law.

Then, Chairman Misuari invited MNLF Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin to represent the MNLF Panel in the deliberation on the issue of cessation of hostilities.

Finally, the MNLF responded to the suggestions on cessation of hostilities made earlier by Indonesian Foreign Minister Alatas in the Cipanas Meeting. At the suggestion of Ambassador Yan, the parties agreed to put into effect Article III paragraph 12 of the Tripoli Agreement, which called for the establishment of a Joint Ceasefire Committee (JCC). What followed then was a discussion of ceasefire and other related matters.

Congressman Ermita presented the GRP Paper entitled “Preliminary Agreement for the Cessation of Hostilities.” The central idea, explained Congressman Ermita, was “to cease hostilities in all spheres, military, political including propaganda...the term hostile acts covers a wide range of issues.”<sup>84</sup> The MNLF concurred with this paper with some minor insertions.

Sessions 10 and 11 on November 3, (Day 10) Wednesday, were devoted to discussions on the details of the Ceasefire Agreement

#### **November 4: Twelfth Session**

During the twelfth session of Day 11, there was again a hardening

of position when issues such as the Provisional Government and Constitutional Process were discussed. The discussions continued until midday, and no consensus was reached.

Ambassador Yan came up with a document titled “Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism” which stated that “the modalities for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in its entirety must be done within the realm of Philippine laws, not international laws or principles...as averted by paragraph 16, Article III of the Tripoli Agreement and that constitutional process must be taken in the light of the fundamental principle of national sovereignty.”<sup>85</sup>

Chairman Misuari on the other hand, expressed the view that the peace talks were “now entering a crucial stage...that the responsibility [lay] with the government of President Ramos to hurdle the legal obstacles posed by the issue of “constitutional process”. This twelfth session adjourned at 12:30 noontime.

#### **November 4: Thirteenth Session**

Foreign Minister Alatas arrived to give encouragement to the parties locked in seemingly unending discussions.

During the session with Minister Alatas, which started at 3:00 PM, Chairman Misuari was encouraged to say that it was finally possible to see the light at the end of the tunnel, although the final solution still remained elusive. He also expressed his gratitude to all those who had helped bring the peace process to its current stage, mentioning the contribution of President Suharto and Foreign Minister Alatas. He commended the OIC Secretary General for his role and praised Ambassador Yan for his impressive ability and integrity as negotiator. He gave an account of the distinctive achievements of the Bangsamoro people centuries ago, pointing out that, in choosing autonomy over independence, the MNLF had made a great compromise. He recounted at length the ups and downs of the long struggle of the Bangsamoro people.<sup>86</sup>

Minister Alatas pointed out that the fact that these agreements were reached in such a short time, despite the complexity of the issues, signified the great ability, good will and seriousness of the participants of the Formal Talks. These achievements were very

concrete and remarkable, he said, emphasizing that it was a good idea that the Formal Talks proceed with issues that were easiest to tackle. He expressed the hope that the Peace Panels could proceed to the next stages with the same propensity for conciliation and wisdom, keeping in mind that a just and peaceful solution was not only in the interest of both parties but also of the entire Filipino nation, not to mention the whole region of Southeast Asia. Taking advantage of that cordial atmosphere, Minister Alatas suggested that the talks be temporarily adjourned to allow each Panel time and opportunity to digest what they had achieved and to ponder on the next steps to be taken.<sup>87</sup>

### November 5: Fourteenth Session

The parties again attempted to discuss an important issue agreed upon in the Cipanas meeting, the modalities for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. However, these discussions only dragged on and did not result in any consensus. Chairman Misuari suggested that the details of the Provisional Government be left to a working committee of experts to be chosen by the Panel.<sup>88</sup> Ambassador Yan then said that the GRP had no objection to this.<sup>89</sup>

An Ad Hoc Working Group was therefore created to continue the discussions on the subject of the Provisional Government. I was one of those nominated as a member of the Committee to represent the MNLF.

Relative to this issue, Ambassador Mohsin made the following points: a) the importance of the question of who would head the Provisional Government. He suggested that a representative from the MNLF be asked to head such a Government because it would neutralize possible complications; b) the autonomy applied in Mindanao would be different from the arrangements in other provinces in the Philippines, and the *Ad Hoc* Group should therefore deal with this; and c) the *Ad Hoc* Committee must be able to find a way out to the different conceptions between the two sides on the future Autonomous Government, noting the preference of the MNLF for Parliamentary System and of the GRP for a Presidential System.

Chairman Misuari, on the other hand, underlined the need for a “doctrine of necessity,” which would allow the two sides to react

flexibly and to create institutions when needed. He said that the capability to meet these requirements needed to be considered.<sup>90</sup>

However, Ambassador Yan clarified that the group dealing with the issue of Provisional Government would be *ad hoc* in nature, and this group was not the same as the Support Committees for other agenda items. The group would be under the ambit of the negotiating panels, not under the Mixed Committee, and it would report its recommendations to the negotiating panels. Ambassador Yan further suggested that the group meet in Manila and other locations in the Philippines.<sup>91</sup>

In the afternoon, the Joint Secretariat, after five successive sessions, came up with the Draft Memorandum of Agreement and the Executive Summary, which were submitted to the Plenary for review. The Panels' discussion of administrative matters went smoothly, and the session adjourned at 11:30 AM.

### November 5: Fifteenth Session

The Chair opened the session at 12:45 by drawing attention to paragraph 16 of Article III of the Tripoli Agreement, stressing the need to reach an agreement on this point and to think of a provisional formulation to be inserted in the Memorandum of Agreement. He noted that paragraph 16 of the Tripoli Agreement stated that:

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines shall take all necessary constitutional processes for the implementation of the entire Agreement.

Ambassador Yan maintained the GRP position of "Constitutional process" as the modality for the full implementation of the entire Agreement.<sup>92</sup>

The Chair then asked the Peace Panels to determine how the term "constitutional process" would relate to the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. Chairman Misuari then suggested that before proceeding, a decision should first be made about paragraph 15 of the Tripoli Agreement and urged that a synchronized position of the two sides be worked out.<sup>93</sup> This particular paragraph stated that:

Immediately after the signature of the Agreement in Manila, a Provisional Government shall be established in the areas of autonomy to be appointed by the President of the Philippines; and be charged with the task of preparing for the elections of the Legislative Assembly in the territories of

the Autonomy; and administer the areas in accordance with the provisions of this agreement until a Government is formed by the elected Legislative Assembly.

Ambassador Yan, in response said that his Panel was not in a position to come into full agreement on paragraph 15. He reiterated the GRP position that the task of establishing the Provisional Government was within the realm of Philippine Sovereignty and Territorial integrity and must be related to the “constitutional processes”. He also pointed out that regarding the “transitional implementing structure and mechanisms,” the GRP was charged with the responsibility to fulfill his task in accordance with its constitutional processes.<sup>94</sup>

Chairman Misuari, in an effort to project a positive response from the MNLF despite the consistent position of the GRP on constitutional process, urged the Peace Panels to work out a tentative agreement which could be refined later so that the *ad hoc* committee can have something to work on. He underscored that whatever was agreed upon would be inchoate in nature, and changes in the structure of the Autonomous Government could later be made as the need arises.<sup>95</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin, responding to what Ambassador Yan had said recognized that Ambassador Yan was not in a position to make decisions on this sensitive issue. However, he supported Chairman Misuari’s suggestion that a tentative framework be put in place to facilitate the work of the *ad hoc* group. He asserted that the ability of the two sides to reach an agreement could solidify confidence in the pursuit of the peace process, including the ceasefire agreement. He stated that internal legal processes were within the complete sovereignty of the GRP, whatever the procedures the GRP chose. He recognized the GRP non-paper on “constitutional processes” as a good paper that clarified the GRP position. He noted a section in the non-paper that stated that the Philippine Constitution was not an inflexible document, meaning that it could be amended. He then suggested that paragraphs 15 and 16 of the Tripoli Agreement be discussed together.<sup>96</sup>

Chairman Misuari elaborated on the concept of “sovereignty” in Islam. He said that unlike in the western concept, in Islam, sovereignty resides with Allah, and that by extension sovereignty rests

with the people who are mandated to exercise sovereignty according to His rules. In other words, "The voice of the people is the voice of God." Describing sovereignty as the will of the people and that it possessed a quality of inalienability and imperishability, he argued that sovereignty of the Bangsamoro people must also be recognized as represented by the MNLF, something that was already recognized by many members of the international community. In this light, he criticized President Aquino for not properly consulting the Bangsamoro people in her past attempt to write a new constitution and explained this as a reason why the MNLF could not recognize the Constitution when it was finally adopted. He recollected that of the fifty members of the constitutional commission, only three Muslims from Mindanao were among them. He pointed out that, in inserting paragraph 16 of the Tripoli Agreement, he and others who signed the Agreement never expected to plant the seeds of discontent. He urged that the Peace Panels see the problem from his perspective.<sup>97</sup>

Ambassador Yan maintained that "constitutional processes" must be seen in the light of national sovereignty, pointing out that as stipulated in the 1987 Constitution sovereignty resided in the people and that all government actions must emanate from the people. He recognized that this was the same position taken by the MNLF Panel. He stated that the GRP Panel would submit a copy of Republic Act 6734 as an initial frame of reference for the *ad hoc* committee in commencing its work after he handed to Chairman Misuari a copy of said RA 6734.<sup>98</sup>

In response, Chairman Misuari suggested that the MNLF would like to add to its structural proposal the Department of *Wakaf*. He also suggested that the text of the final agreement should include a paragraph that would state that the autonomous Government shall have the right to reduce, abolish or increase executive organs in accordance with the exigency of the situation.<sup>99</sup>

Ambassador Yan took the gesture of Chairman Misuari positively as having accepted the proposal of the GRP Panel to use the RA 6734 as one of the frames of reference, and stated that the MNLF request for one additional Department will be transmitted to the authorities in Manila.<sup>100</sup>

The Chair then concluded that thus far the tentative agreement

reached by the Peace Panels was to accept the documents submitted by the two sides as initial frames of reference for the *ad hoc* group.<sup>101101</sup> Ibid, Para 434, Page 77.

OIC Ambassador Mohsin recalled the agreements reached as follows: A. the Panels agreed to set up an ad hoc group and that each side had designated its representatives in that group; B. the *ad hoc* group has no decision-making authority; they would only recommend to this negotiating panel in its next meeting; C. the terms of reference for this group are as follows: 1) the group has as its reference two documents from each side, which can be added or subtracted; and 2) the MNLF had requested two additional Departments to be set, one for Religious Affairs (not just for Islam but also for other religions) and one for *Wakaf*.

After discussions on the draft memorandum of understanding and the joint press statement presented by the Joint Secretariat, the session adjourned at 5:30 PM.

### November 6: Sixteenth Session

The Chair opened the session at 11:15 AM by inviting the Peace Panels to submit their comments on the draft Memorandum of Agreement.

Discussions of a more substantive nature took place over the additional terms of agreement reached since the draft of the Memorandum of Agreement was presented. Chairman Misuari, in fact, expressed the MNLF's sense of betrayal regarding how the past Philippine Administrations rescinded their earlier expressed recognition of the MNLF as the sole and legitimate representative of the Bangsamoro people by collaborating with third parties.<sup>102</sup>

OIC Ambassador Mohsin seemed to support the line expressed by Chairman Misuari as he put forward the view that in the setting up of the Provisional Government, even if democratic considerations were to be paramount, these would have to be set aside as the members of the said government had to be appointed. The GRP had to decide which organization had both internal and external support. He further reiterated the OIC assessment that the MNLF constituted the sole and legitimate representative of the Muslims of the Southern Philippines. He therefore called on the GRP to accord



to the MNLF the same recognition.<sup>103</sup>

Ambassador Yan replied that Ambassador Mohsin's proposal would be one of the items for discussion by the Ad Hoc Working Group and that he would include it in the GRP panel's report to the President.<sup>104</sup>

Because of this exchange of views, Chairman Misuari was inspired to state that eventually the MNLF would govern the Autonomous Region and that this should be reflected in the Memorandum of Agreement; in this way, Chairman Misuari emphasized, the mistakes of the past could be avoided.<sup>105</sup>

Consistent with the OIC recognition of the MNLF, Ambassador Mohsin submitted for consideration of the Formal Talks the view that referring to the OIC Karachi Resolution, the authorities concerned could also recognize the MNLF as the sole and legitimate representative of the Bangsamoro people in the Southern Philippines for the sake of future peace and stability in the region and keeping in mind the sad experiences of the past. He further expressed the view that an agreement at this point was an important prerequisite for a smooth and satisfactory transitional arrangement for the setting up of a government in the Autonomous Region.

Chairman Misuari, believing in the integrity and sincerity of Ambassador Yan, said that the issue need not be formally incorporated in the Memorandum of Agreement since Ambassador Yan had given his own personal commitment to convey the MNLF views to President Ramos.

The Panels adopted the proposal of Chairman Misuari, and the session adjourned at 1 PM.

### **November 6 to 7: Seventeenth Session**

The second session for the day resumed at 11:30 in the evening. The session began late because Chairman Misuari, Dr. Amin and I visited the Ambassador of Pakistan to Jakarta in his office in the Pakistan Embassy. The MNLF Chairman had a long talk with the Ambassador and he briefed the Ambassador on the progress of the negotiations. It may be recalled that Pakistan is one of the Muslim countries that is very supportive of the MNLF in the OIC forum. The MNLF even maintains a Directorate Office in Islamabad and a

liaison office in Karachi.

When we arrived at the hotel, Chairman Misuari received a report from Cotabato City about the speech delivered by President Ramos during the anniversary of the ARMM. The MNLF Chairman reacted strongly to this report. He took it to mean that President Ramos was engaged in double talk. While facing the MNLF at the negotiating table, he was, at the same time, strengthening the very institution that the MNLF considered as a roadblock to peace in the Bangsamoro Homeland. He gathered the members of the MNLF Delegation for consultation and after that went to his room to make *Salat* (Prayer). Then, the MNLF delegation entered the Conference room. The OIC and GRP officials did not have any idea what had caused our delay until we arrived.

At the start of the session, Ambassador Mohsin read out a message by H.E. Dr. Hamid Algabid, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. In his message, Dr. Algabid congratulated the Panels for the good spirit that had marked the Formal Talks. He also urged them to continue their efforts for a successful conclusion of the Talks in the interest of all concerned parties and on the basis of the Tripoli Agreement which the OIC had the privilege of sponsoring.<sup>106</sup>

When the turn of the MNLF Chairman to speak came, he immediately proposed the deletion of the sentence reading "The Ad Hoc Working Group should proceed with the tasks by referring to all documents and non-paper submitted during this Formal Peace Talks, including the MNLF position paper and the RA 6734 as the initial frame of reference." He alluded to the speech given earlier in the day by President Ramos on the occasion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the ARMM. Chairman Misuari expressed his doubts about the intentions of the GRP in the peace process arguing that the GRP was trying to renege on its commitment to implement the Tripoli Agreement by insisting on the ARMM formula. Without any hesitation, the MNLF Chairman expressed fears that the GRP could have a 'hidden agenda' as might be gleaned from the speech of the President. He then demanded that all references to the ARMM and R.A. 6734 be deleted from the record of the proceedings.

At the suggestion of the Chair and despite the preference of Ambassador Yan to continue the discussion, Chairman Misuari

expressed a preference to adjourn the session in order to allow for more consultation with the members of the MNLF Panel. The Chair adjourned the session at two o'clock in the morning, November 7.

Clouds of doubts again hovered over the horizon. The MNLF Panel returned to their assigned rooms and began intensive discussions among themselves. The GRP Panel reportedly had to call the President in Manila for consultations.

### November 7: Closing Session

In the morning, I assisted Ambassador Yan and Congressman Ermita at an early morning meeting with the MNLF Chairman in the latter's room. This was the height of "Room Diplomacy", for they showed him the letter of President Ramos explaining the content and intentions of Ramos's recent speech during the ARMM inauguration.<sup>107</sup>

The Indonesian hosts were devising their own way of defusing the tension. A special meeting with Minister Alatas was also arranged that morning. The Indonesian Foreign Minister had to meet the two Panels separately and then in a joint session.

Chairman Misuari had high respect for the Indonesian Foreign Minister and the Government of Indonesia. With the assurance from Minister Alatas, the MNLF Chairman relented on certain conditions.

In the closing session that followed, the Panels agreed as earlier resolved in the presence of Minister Alatas according to a request from the MNLF "to delete the reference to RA 6734 or the ARMM in the Memorandum of Agreement and in the Executive Summary."<sup>108</sup> Ambassador Yan also informed the Plenary that President Ramos had written him a letter dated November 7 pertaining to the misunderstanding caused by the President's speech in Mindanao. In that letter, the President reiterated the "firm resolve of the national leadership to do everything possible to continuously and meaningfully advance the welfare of our Muslim brethren."<sup>109</sup>

Finally, the First Round of Formal Talks ended in the afternoon of November 7 with the signing of two agreements, the Memorandum of Agreement and the Interim GRP-MNLF Ceasefire Agreement. The Executive Summary of the Proceedings prepared by the Joint

Secretariat was also approved.

The session, which adjourned at 5:30 PM, resulted in the following points in the Memorandum of Agreement:

- I. The establishment of the Joint Secretariat made up of representatives from the GRP and the MNLF Panels as well as from the Secretary General of the OIC and Indonesia representing the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six
- II. The continuation for the duration of the Formal Talks of the task assigned to the Joint Secretariat to categorize the items in the proposed agenda
- III. The listing of nine substantive items for discussion (with other items to be discussed at a later stage)
  1. National Defense
  2. Education
  3. Administrative System
  4. Economic and Financial system
  5. Regional Security Force
  6. Representation in National Government
  7. Legislative Assembly and Executive Council
  8. Mines and Minerals
  9. Judiciary and Introduction of Shariah
- IV. The Creation of Support Committees
  1. Support Committee 1 (SC #1) (National Defense and Regional Security Force)
  2. Support Committee 2 (SC #2) (Education)
  3. Support Committee 3 (SC #3) (Economic and Financial Systems, Mines and Minerals)
  4. Support Committee 4 (SC #4) (Administrative System, Representation in National Government, Legislative Assembly and Executive Council)
  5. Support Committee 5 (SC #5) (Judiciary and Introduction of *Shariah* Law)
- V. The mandate for each committee of the task of examining all the relevant issues in their respective areas of responsibility and of submitting their respective reports with the recommendations to the Mixed Committee (with meetings to be held in Manila, Zamboanga and elsewhere in Southern Philippines and with the Indonesian Embassy in Manila as contact point)

- VI. The reactivation of the Mixed Committee 'to study in detail the points left for discussion in order to reach a solution thereof in conformity with the provisions of this agreement'
- VII. The Formation of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Setting Up of the Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism with their task to study the respective proposals of the GRP and the MNLF Panels on the transitional implementing structure and mechanism and to submit their recommendations to the Negotiating Panels for the latter's consideration and approval
- VIII. The maintenance of the pledge of the Peace Panels to abide by the provisions of the 1993 Interim GRP-MNLF Ceasefire Agreement during ongoing negotiations (to be linked to substantial progress of negotiations)
- IX. The Approval of the Executive Summary of the Proceedings
- X. The setting of the date and venue of the Second Formal Talks (to be held in Indonesia on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1994)

The Ceasefire Agreement contained the following points:

- 1. That the ceasefire agreed between former President Aquino and MNLF Chairman Misuari on September 5, 1986 be formalized;
- 2. That the forces of both parties remain in their respective places and refrain from any provocation or acts of hostilities contrary to the said agreement, provided that the representatives of the OIC help supervise in the implementation of the Agreement through the Joint Committee;
- 3. That a Joint Committee provided in the Tripoli Agreement be constituted immediately, to be composed of representatives from the GRP, MNLF with the help of the OIC represented by the Ministerial Committee of the Six;
- 4. That the Joint Committee prepare its own detailed guidelines and ground rules to be submitted not later than 30<sup>th</sup> November 1993 for approval; and
- 5. That the Interim Ceasefire Agreement take effect immediately.

### Post-Jakarta Analysis

Many have expressed their views on the aftermath of the successful Jakarta negotiations. Senator Rasul, a Muslim Senator from Sulu who also sat as a member of the GRP Peace Panel in the last league of the talks said, "The growing consensus is that the MNLF can help resolve the problem because of its influence in the area." "Otherwise," she

continued, “the Christian provinces will continue to boom while Sulu, Lanao and other Muslim areas will see a deterioration.”<sup>110</sup> Senator Rasul likewise believed that President Ramos was prepared to make substantial compromises and that he would be willing to appoint someone like Misuari as a Presidential Assistant for Muslim affairs – a kind of Vice-President for Muslim Mindanao. “A solution can be reached if both panels are sincere enough and are open-minded and innovative,” Senator Rasul emphasized.<sup>111</sup>

Congressman Ermita said of his friend, “Misuari is a rebel with a cause... he knows that if political conditions improve in Mindanao, economic development will take place and everyone will share in the harvest.”<sup>112</sup>

Congressman Michael Mastura<sup>113</sup> expressed optimism on the results of the negotiations, as he believed that “Misuari is in his mid-career He’s mature and is no longer a rabble-rouser. Like wine, he’s mellowed...while the Ramos government has the necessary political will. There is nothing it won’t use to buy peace.”<sup>114</sup>

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### Endnotes, Chapter 3

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<sup>1</sup> Opening Statement of H.E. Dr. Ali Alatas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, First Formal Talks between the GRP and the MNLF, Jakarta, 25 October 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Opening Statement of H. E. The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference, Dr. Hamid Algabid, at the First Formal Talks between the GRP and the MNLF, Jakarta, Indonesia, October 25, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Opening Statement of H. E. Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, Chairman of the GRP Panel, at the First Formal Talks between the GRP and the MNLF, Jakarta, Indonesia, October 25, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Opening Statement of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari at the First Formal Talks of the MNLF and GRP with the participation of the OIC, Jakarta, Indonesia, 25 October 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Opening Statement of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, at the First Formal Talks of the MNLF and GRP with the participation of the OIC, Jakarta, Indonesia, 25 October 1993.

<sup>6</sup> *The Jakarta Post*, Tuesday, October 26, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the Formal Peace Talks between the GRP and the MNLF with the participation of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General, Jakarta, Indonesia, 25 October- 7 November 1993, Para 7 page 4 .

<sup>11</sup> Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the Formal Peace Talks between the GRP and the MNLF with the participation of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General, Jakarta, Indonesia, 25 October- 7 November 1993, Para 9, 11, pp.5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Para 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Para 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Para 15.

<sup>16</sup> Tripoli Agreement, Article III, Para 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, Para 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, Para 17.

<sup>19</sup> Report of the Chairman of the Joint Secretariat, Dr. Hassan Wirajuda of the Indonesian Delegation. He later assumed the role of Chairman of the Mixed Committee Meetings held in the country.

<sup>20</sup> Executive Summary, First Formal Talks, Para 24.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Para 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Para 29.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, Para 30.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, Para 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, Para 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, Para 34.

<sup>27</sup> *The Jakarta Post*, Wednesday, October 27, 1993.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> *The Indonesia Times*, Wednesday, October 27, 1993.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Executive Summary...Para 41.

<sup>33</sup> Tripoli Agreement, article III, Para 2.

<sup>34</sup> Executive Summary, Para 47-48, page 14.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, Para 49, page 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, Para 51, page 15.

<sup>38</sup> Executive Summary, Para 60-61, pages 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> Executive Summary, Para 68, page 19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, Para 69, pages 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> Tripoli Agreement, Article III, Para 6

- <sup>43</sup> Executive Summary, Para 77, Page 21.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid, Para 78, page 21.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, Para 79 and 83, page 22-23.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid, Para 84, page 23.
- <sup>47</sup> Tripoli Agreement, Article III, Para 10.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid, Para 89, page 24.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid, Para 93, Page 25.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid, Para 96, Page 26.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid, Para 97, Page 26.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, Para 98, Page 26.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, Para 99, Page 27.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, Para 100, Page 27.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, Para 101, Page 27.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid, Para 102, Page 27.
- <sup>59</sup> Tripoli Agreement, Article III, Para 9.
- <sup>60</sup> Executive Summary, Para 105, Page 28.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid, Para 106, Page 29.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid, Para 108, Page 29.
- <sup>63</sup> Tripoli Agreement, Article III, Para 7.
- <sup>64</sup> Executive Summary, Para 112, Page 30.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid, Para 113, Page 30.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid, Para 114, Page 31.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid, Para 115, Page 31.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid, Para 116, Page 31.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid, Para 130, Page 33.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid, Para 143, Page 34.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid, Para 159, Page 36.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid, Para 160, Page 36.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid, Para 221, Page 42.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid, Para 222, Page 42.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid, Para 260, 262, 265, Page 47.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid, Para 269, Page 48.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid, Para 288, Page 51.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid, Para 291, Page 51.



- <sup>79</sup> Ibid, Para 293, Page 51.
- <sup>80</sup> Tripoli Agreement, Article III, Para 15.
- <sup>81</sup> Executive Summary, Para 302, Page 53.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid, Para 303, Page 53.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid, Para 304, Page 53.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid, Para 322.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid, Para 345.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid, Para 355, page 66.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid, Para 388, Page 72.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid, Para 395, Page 72.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid, Para 400, Page 73.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid, Para 401, Page 73.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid, Para 417, page 75.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid, Par 418-421, Page 75.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid, Para 422, Page 75.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid, Para 423, Page 75.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid, Para 425, pages 75-76.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid, Para 426, Page 76.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid, Para 428, Page 76-77.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid, Para 429, Page 77.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid, Para 430, Page 77.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid, Para 444-445, page 78-79.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid, Para 446, Page 79.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid, Para 447, Page 79.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid, Para 450, Page 79.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid, Para 461, Page 80.
- <sup>107</sup> See also Ramos, "Break Not The Peace..." p. 37.
- <sup>108</sup> Executive Summary, First... Para 470.
- <sup>110</sup> "Fresh Hope in the South: Manila and Muslim Rebels Draw Up Plans for Peace," *Asiaweek*, December 1, 1993, page 37.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>113</sup> Congressman, 1<sup>st</sup> District, Maguindanao up to 1995. He is now adviser to the MILF Panel negotiating with the GRP (2005).

<sup>114</sup> “Fresh Hope...” *Asiaweek*, December 1, 1993.



## 1994: Taking the High Road



Abel Inibami as chairman of MNLF  
Secretariat with Chairman Nur Misuari  
and Dr. Parouk Hussin at the  
U.N. Complex, New York City after  
attending the MNLF-OC meeting.  
Oct. 25, 1995 in New York City.

*Surely, We revealed it on the Night of Majesty. And what will make thee comprehend what the Night of Majesty is? The Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of the Lord for every affair. Peace, it is till the rising of the morning.*  
—Qur'an, XVII: 34

## Organizing the MNLF Secretariat

**November 1993.** This period was devoted to the organization of the MNLF Secretariat in consultation with senior officials of the MNLF. Muslim professionals were invited to help, and those of them who were working with government were given the necessary clearance on official time by their respective offices with recommendations from the GRP Panel.

Policy guidelines were drafted for the guidance of the MNLF Panel on how to proceed with the talks and relate with the GRP Panel. The policy of the MNLF Secretariat was to refer all major issues to the MNLF Chairman or the MNLF Secretary General for final decision. We had learned our lessons in the failed GRP-MNLF Talks in 1987 where I served as a member of the MNLF Secretariat.

## The Kidnapping of Mr. Charles Walton

On November 17, GRP and MNLF officials, in the presence of Ambassadors Rajab and Damanik, met in Manila for the first time after the Jakarta Talks. But the meeting was greeted by the news of the kidnapping of an American linguist, Mr. Charles Walton, in Pangutaran, Sulu. Congressman Ermita sounded off the MNLF for assistance in the negotiations for the possible safe release of Mr. Walton.

The kidnappers were reported to be members of the Abu Sayyaf. But according to MNLF intelligence report, the original kidnappers were not Abu Sayyaf members but armed men previously identified with certain influential groups in Sulu. For five days, no word came out regarding the whereabouts of the group. They kept on transferring from one island to another but the people refused them assistance

and refuge. The kidnapers and the victim with them became mobile not only for security reasons but because they could hardly find a place where they could hold ground. According to MNLF intelligence report, the Abu Sayyaf finally took custody of the victim and brought him to their area in Patikul, about 15 kilometers from the town of Jolo. It was there that negotiations started. A list of demands was reported to have been made by the kidnapers. Among these were a ban on foreign fishing vessels in areas surrounding Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi Provinces; the return of the Barter Trade System to Zamboanga and Jolo; and the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. Money ransom, even if reported in the press, would always be denied by the Abu Sayyaf. Government negotiators tried to approach them. No less than then Vice-President Joseph Estrada tried his hand on the matter with the assistance of Sulu Congressman Bensaudi Tulawie. But after several days, the negotiations produced no positive results.<sup>1</sup>

It was during this time when Ambassador Rajab relayed to the MNLF Panel the urgent request of the GRP for possible coordination in the negotiations with the kidnapers. In coordination with the GRP Secretariat headed by Dr. Pat Lontoc, I arranged a top-level meeting between MNLF and GRP officials with Ambassador Rajab, on December 1 at the Manila Hotel to discuss the issue of the Walton kidnapping as part of the GRP-MNLF confidence-building-measure (CBM).

Representing the GRP side were Defense Secretary Renato De Villa, Congressman Ermita, Defense Undersecretary Feleciano Gacis, DILG Secretary Alunan, and PNP Chief General Rodriguez. The MNLF was represented by Secretary-General Muslimin Sema, MNLF National Intelligence Chief Dr. Tham Manjoorsa, MNLF Military Intelligence Chief and MNLF Joint Ceasefire Committee Chairman Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, MNLF Deputy Secretary General for Military Affairs, Brig. Gen. Abu Amri Taddik, and me as MNLF Emissary.

That meeting was very significant. For the first time since the MNLF struggle began in 1968, top defense and military officials of the GRP and MNLF met together not as negotiators sitting across each other in a negotiating table nor as combatants in a certain battle but as one working committee trying to come up with a strategy on

how to respond to a kidnapping situation in Sulu. This is just one of several GRP-MNLF meetings that President Ramos referred to as “not bargaining sessions but more a mutual search for solutions.”<sup>2</sup> There was exchange of views and information on the issue of peace and order and the parties agreed to come up with coordinated efforts to effect the safe release of Mr. Walton.

As a result of that meeting, Ambassador Rajab went to Sulu to help in the negotiation. He then proceeded to the hideout of the Abu Sayyaf in Patikul in the company of Sulu MNLF leaders. In the afternoon of December 7, the Abu Sayyaf released Mr. Walton to the Libyan Ambassador in the company of MNLF leaders and Congressman Tulawie without ransom.

The following day, December 8, I issued, as MNLF Spokesman, statements saying that the joint efforts conducted by the GRP and MNLF for the safe release of Mr. Walton from his Abu Sayyaf captors gave impetus to the confidence-building measures that were now in place. The MNLF as a revolutionary organization observed revolutionary ethics and the canons of civilized society and condemned all forms of terrorism.<sup>3</sup>

### **Arrival of the MNLF Chairman**

The arrival of Chairman Misuari on December 19 at Lupah Sug, Sulu, rekindled the hope for lasting peace and ignited the interest of the Bangsamoro people in the peace process. Delegations coming from various sectors of the Bangsamoro Homeland were in Timbangan to welcome the Chairman. Streamers and placards were displayed in many houses and buildings in the town of Jolo welcoming him. “All roads lead to Timbangan” became the favorite slogan among Jolo residents.

Our preparations for the arrival of the MNLF Chairman in Jolo and the First Mixed Committee meeting were coordinated with the Indonesian Embassy as the official contact point agreed in the Jakarta Talks and the GRP Panel in terms of administration security and other related matters. Various civic organizations in the Bangsamoro Homeland particularly the Civil Society Group in Sulu have also extended a helping hand and have been mobilizing people in support of the peace process.

### **Visit of OIC Secretary-General Hamid Algabid**

The OIC Secretary General, Dr. Hamid Algabid, and his Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin came to Jolo for this historic meeting. We had earlier (December 6) sent an official invitation signed by Members of the MNLF Panel for the OIC Secretary General to visit the Bangsamoro Homeland particularly Jolo for the First Mixed Committee Meeting.<sup>4</sup>

The Libyan Ambassador, Rajab Azzarouq, represented his country as member of the OIC Committee of Six. The Indonesian Ambassador Pieter Damanik who had been active in facilitating the Joint Ceasefire Committee Meetings was also in their company. Heading the Indonesian Delegation representing the Chairman of the OIC Committee of Six was Dr. Hassan Wirajuda and the members of his staff from the Department of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. Dr. Hassan presided over the Meeting as Chairman of the Mixed Committee in behalf of Ambassador Wiryono.

H.E. Ambassador Manuel Yan accompanied by Rep. Ermita as Vice Chairman headed the GRP Panel. The Panel also included then DILG Undersecretary Alexander Aguirre, Chairman of the GRP Ad Hoc Working Group and other members of the GRP Panel, all from the civilian and military sectors of the government.

In accordance with the understanding made in Jakarta, the GRP as the host government provided the necessary administrative requirements like transportation and accommodation for the official members of the MNLF Delegations when meetings between the GRP and MNLF were held in the country. The GRP also provided limited communication facilities when requested. My office, the MNLF Secretariat, received this administrative support from the Office of Ambassador Yan on a monthly basis and allocated the amount to the various MNLF Support Committees and the Joint Ceasefire Committee, including the MNLF Chairman and members of his entourage. My office was required by the GRP Secretariat to liquidate the amount regularly by submitting official receipts and other supporting documents to justify the expenses, which I did on a monthly basis.

I still recall how I got this job of handling the administrative requirements of the MNLF Panel, Support Committees, JCC, and



even the MNLF as a whole during this period of the negotiations. The MNLF Delegation was having breakfast with the MNLF Chairman at the hotel's coffee shop during our first day in the First round of Talks. I noticed that the waiter was just going around waving the bill but nobody from among the MNLF Delegation was moving to respond to the waiter. I did not expect the MNLF Chairman to pay. I then took the bill and signed on it with my room number. The amount represented the total cost of breakfast for 23 people, all members of the MNLF Delegation. Of course it was the Indonesian Government that finally assumed the cost of our fourteen-day stay in that historic Hotel Indonesia. But from then on the MNLF Chairman had assigned to me this administrative job in addition to my being the MNLF Peace Emissary to the GRP, Chairman of the MNLF Secretariat, and MNLF Spokesman.

The delegations arrived in Jolo in three Philippine Air Force planes on December 20. They were met at the airport by Top MNLF and Sulu Provincial officials and other leaders of the province. An MNLF official relayed the invitation of MNLF Chairman Misuari for the parties to proceed first to Timbangan<sup>5</sup> to join him in the MNLF General Assembly Meeting being held there to honor this historic meeting in Jolo.

At first there was some hesitation on the part of GRP officials to accept the invitation because it was not part of the official program. Besides, security became a problem especially for the OIC and Indonesian officials because the Preparation Committee did not discuss this earlier. But the local leaders particularly those sympathizers of the MNLF were pushing the idea as they wanted the OIC officials to visit the MNLF Camp.

There was a standoff. Sulu Governor Loong brought the OIC and GRP officials to the Provincial Capitol. Then Ermita, sensing some potential problem, decided to come with me to see the MNLF Chairman. Along the way, fully armed MNLF forces were deployed as road security. Ermita tried to explain to the MNLF Chairman that the OIC and GRP officials couldn't just come immediately because security had to be arranged first and he promised to relay this invitation to them himself.

The MNLF Chairman decided to come to meet the OIC and GRP officials in the town, but along the way we met the convoys bringing

the OIC, GRP and MNLF officials that were already proceeding to Timbangan. It was a very historic yet delicate moment. The people were overwhelmed by the presence of these leaders from the Muslim World who were coming for the first time to a place that were once the battleground between MNLF and GRP forces. Security was tight as handled by both GRP and MNLF forces. But nothing untoward happened as the parties moved to the MNLF Camp.

Then a brief but historic program was held. In his short speech, Chairman Misuari invited the attention of his distinguished guests to the socio-economic plight of the Bangsamoro people and their war-torn homeland. He impressed upon them that this historic visit would be indelibly written in the pages of the golden history of his people. Then he proclaimed December 20 as "OIC-Bangsamoro Solidarity Day." A marker made of brass would be placed later in Timbangan to mark this historic occasion for posterity.

For his part, the OIC Secretary-General read his message (in French, which was then translated to English by his Aide) where he underscored the commitment of the OIC to provide optimum assistance towards the comprehensive and honorable resolution of the problems of the Muslims in Southern Philippines. He also reiterated the OIC's recognition of the MNLF under the leadership of Chairman Misuari as the sole and legitimate representative of the Muslims even as he emphasized that the Tripoli Agreement and other succeeding agreements and understandings constitute a just and firm basis to carry the on-going peace process forward.

GRP Panel Chairman Ambassador Yan declared the government's sincerity to bring the current peace initiatives into a mutually acceptable conclusion as this is in pursuance to the declared policy of the Ramos Administration. He also gave assurance that the GRP Panel will elevate the peace process to a higher level.

That short but historic gathering was capped by the presentation of MNLF Flags by Chairman Misuari to the OIC Secretary-General and the Chairman of the GRP Panel.

### **The Mixed Committee Meeting**

To many observers, the 'Timbangan Encounter' set the positive and friendly tone of the First Mixed Committee Meeting that

followed later in the day. During the meeting proper, Chairman Misuari assured the other parties of the honesty of his purpose and the nobility of his intention and declared his confidence in the sincere intention of Ambassador Yan and President Ramos in trying to bring the Peace Talks to a mutually acceptable and honorable conclusion. He informed the body that he has invited the most dedicated and honest people to man the different committees and other bodies to carry out the patriotic task of building the structures of peace and development.

It was also because of that Timbangan experience that Dr. Hassan Wirajuda was inspired to declare that the Jolo meeting “symbolizes the ever-growing spirit of mutual confidence between all the parties concerned that in turn is essential for the success of our common endeavor.”

The following were among the major points taken up and agreed upon during the meeting:<sup>6</sup>

1. Announcement by the OIC Secretary General of the appointment of H.E. Ambassador Muhammad Mohsin, OIC Assistant Secretary-General as his Special Representative to the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks.
2. Announcement of the MNLF Chairman of the appointment of the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of MNLF Support Committees with the other members to be announced and submitted later.
3. Ambassador Yan also presented the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen and members of the GRP Support Committees with Technical Consultants and Advisers whose appointments were duly approved by the President.
4. Presentation by the Joint Ceasefire Committee of the Proposed Guidelines and Groundrules of the Cease Agreement for review by the Panel. Chairman Misuari suggested that the OIC should not only be tasked to assist but to actively participate in supervising the implementation of the Cease-fire Agreement and that the JCC should be composed of representatives from the MNLF, GRP and the OIC. Pending the approval of the document, Amb. Mohsin of the OIC suggested that the parties should continue to observe the Interim Cease-fire Agreement.
5. Schedule of meetings of Support Committees and the Ad-Hoc Working Group in the Philippines (Manila, Zamboanga, Cotabato, Marawi City and Jolo). Chairman Misuari suggested that the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Setting Up of the Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism should meet on December 28-30, 1993 in Timbangan and the succeeding meetings could be held in Zamboanga and Cotabato. He also said that the issue of a Mixed Committee Meeting in Manila (as

suggested by Ambassador Yan) is a very delicate matter and will be studied by the MNLF leaders.

6. The schedule of 2<sup>nd</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting in January 1994 and the re-scheduling of the Second Formal Talks to March 1994.

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Yan said that he was deeply impressed by his visit to Timbangan and that the gathering symbolizes the collective desire of the people for lasting peace.

Chairman Misuari, in his closing statement, informed the body of the interests of the governments of Egypt and Scandinavia to send technical people to help in economic development. He also informed them of assurances of financial assistance he received from the Muslim World that would be brought to Southern Philippines upon the resolution of the problem.

### **The First Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group**

As requested by the MNLF, the meeting was held on December 28 in Timbangan where the MNLF Chairman held temporary office. This is also where the MNLF Camp Khalid bin Walid was located.

The GRP Delegation was headed by Congressman Ermita with DILG Undersecretary Alexander P. Aguirre as Chairman of the GRP Ad Hoc Working Group. Misuari who earlier took the Chairmanship of the MNLF Ad Hoc Working Group headed the MNLF Delegation. Indonesian Embassy officials headed by Charge d'Affairs Yusbar Jamil represented the Chair of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six. Libyan Ambassador Rajab was also present.

The meeting was brief. The MNLF Panel presented its proposal on the structure of the Proposed Provisional Government. The GRP Panel received the proposal and asked for time to review the same in order for them to make the appropriate response.

The Ad Hoc Working Group also agreed on the schedules of Support Committee meetings in Jolo, Zamboanga City, Marawi City, Cotabato City and General Santos City.

*The year 1993 thus ended* with both parties preparing for more detailed discussions of the agenda items in the Support Committee levels. The MNLF Headquarters in Timbangan became the center of MNLF activities as the MNLF Chairman held his temporary office and residence there. Daily meetings were held and on many occasions

the meetings lasted even up to the early morning hours. A social hall had to be constructed for the meetings in order to make the participants comfortable. The MNLF even requested the GRP Panel to facilitate the installation of telephone and electric power facilities in the area. Different kinds of visitors came to visit the MNLF Chairman: foreign and local media for an interview; friends and relatives; supporters and allies; and the MNLF leaders from different commands in Mindanao.

The historic First Mixed Committee Meeting in Jolo and the Ad Hoc Meeting that followed right in the MNLF Camp in Timbangan boosted the morale of the MNLF leadership and their followers. This can be observed from the series of meetings held by the Chairman with selected Bangsamoro leaders and the flow of visitors to the MNLF Camp.

Yet even as the GRP moved with confidence, the MNLF remained still cautious of their approach to the meetings in the country. To the MNLF, the obvious reluctance of the GRP Panel to discuss substantial issues in the just concluded Ad Hoc Committee meeting was not encouraging. In a letter to the Ambassadors of OIC Member countries in Manila, the MNLF Chairman talked of “snags affecting the on-going peace process” as he sent senior MNLF leaders “to explain...our current assessment and predicament on the peace process.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Delegation from the MILF**

Efforts to unite all sectors of the Bangsamoro society behind the peace process and under the legitimate leadership of the MNLF, as encouraged by the OIC, had been going on. Representatives of the MNLF had been holding a series of meetings with prominent and recognized leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Cotabato. Responding to these unity efforts, the MILF representatives headed by Prof. Moner Bajunaid<sup>8</sup> visited the MNLF Chairman in Timbangan and conveyed the position of the MILF on the peace process.

Chairman Misuari, responding to this goodwill gesture from the MILF, expressed his intention to meet with MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat in Cotabato. But the meeting did not push through because

of the cancellation of Chairman Misuari's visit to Cotabato due to security problems. The MNLF Chairman wanted to head the MNLF Delegation in the Support Committee #1 (SC#1) meeting in Cotabato City, but the plan was not implemented.

The MNLF leadership had become very cautious of their moves. Reportedly, an MNLF intelligence group had gathered reliable information of threats against the life of the MNLF Chairman "from certain political entities allegedly in collusion with some elements in the Armed Forces as well as certain multi-national corporations."<sup>9</sup>

### **Second Ad Hoc Working Group Committee**

This intelligence report made the MNLF decide to request for the transfer of the venue of the scheduled Second Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting from Jolo to Timbangan in the first week of February 1994. But the GRP side did not agree with the proposal. The GRP delegation was composed of DILG Undersecretary Alexander Aguirre (serving as Chairman), Atty. Teresita de Castro of the Department of Justice, Congressman Baltazar Satur, and ARMM Vice Governor Nabil Tan. Other support officials of the GRP were Brig. Gen. Ruiz and Sulu PNP Provincial Director Aukasa Handa.

The MNLF Delegation was composed of Atty. Didagen Dilangalen, designated as Chairman of the Delegation, all the Chairmen of the Support Committees, as well as selected MNLF top officials.

The meeting was presided over by Indonesian Embassy officials headed by Minister Counselor Yusbar Djamil.

The said meeting lasted only one day instead of 2 days as scheduled due to security problems. The two parties exchanged views on the agenda but did not produce any consensus.

The GRP Delegation went back to Zamboanga in the afternoon of the same day and only the following day was the message sent through the PNP in Jolo that the meeting had been postponed.

To consolidate support within the OIC members, particularly those within the ASEAN Region, the MNLF Chairman also sent letter to the Sultan of Brunei to "express sincerest thanks and deep gratitude for officially and publicly stressing your country's support to the on-going peace process."<sup>10</sup>

## **Meeting of the MNLF Chairman with some Political Leaders of Sulu**

After the Ad Hoc working Group meeting in Jolo, the Chairman went to Panamao and Luuk to meet with the political leaders in the area. He was accompanied by over 200 MNLF leaders and security forces. In Panamao, he was received by Mayor Habib Bagis Talib and his leaders. Then he proceeded to Panglima Estino Municipality where he met with the Estino family headed by Maas Bawang and his sons, Mayor Hadji Kadil Estino, and Hadji Munib Estino who was then Vice- Governor of Sulu. The entourage also proceeded to Kapual, Luuk, where they met with Mayor Hadji Ahmad Omar and his leaders.

In all these meetings, these political leaders who were once leading personalities in the MNLF in the early 1970s renewed their support and understanding for the MNLF cause and its leadership, saying publicly that they realized their mistakes in the past and that their hearts and souls are still with the PARHIMPUNAN (The Organization, referring to the MNLF).

These meetings with these political leaders were a breakthrough as far as reconciliation with Sulu leaders is concerned. Many people considered these meetings as having positive effect on the peace process and the height of statesmanship and magnanimity for the MNLF leadership.

Other Sulu leaders whose municipalities were not visited instead paid their courtesy visit on the MNLF Chairman in Timbangan, like the Maldisa Clan of Maimbung and other leaders of outlying municipalities.

## **The Visit of Senator Santanina Rasul to Timbangan**

Senator Santanina Rasul accompanied by her husband, former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Abraham Rasul, and her staff visited the MNLF Chairman in Timbangan on January 29, 1994. They talked about the present state of political affairs in the country and Senator Rasul assured the Chairman of the sincerity and honest intention of President Ramos in the peace process with the MNLF.

Misuari also expressed the noble intention of the MNLF

eadership in this ongoing efforts and expounded the MNLF policy on the sharing of political leadership with those who are already in government, clearly defining to the Senator that those leaders in government had nothing to fear from the possible settlement of the MNLF and GRP as they would not be removed but would instead remain in their legal positions.

### **MNLF Leadership Meeting**

Even this early, the MNLF already started to make consultations with the people starting with the leaders of the MNLF.

The MNLF Leadership Meeting was held in Timbangan on February 26-28, 1994. Senior leaders and MNLF State Chairman all over Mindanao came to the meeting. The Chairmen and members of the various Support Committees were also in attendance.

On the second day (February 27), the Plenary came up with a General Resolution which was approved in the plenary giving full mandate to the MNLF Chairman to determine the final position of the MNLF in the ongoing peace talks with the GRP. It also reiterated support and loyalty to his leadership.

It was on the third day (Feb 28) that the Chairman, in the presence of the MNLF leaders placed a marker with a plaque of declaration for the OIC-Bangsamoro Solidarity Day (December 20, 1993) on a site in Timbangan to mark the historic visit of OIC and GRP officials to the area.

### **Start of MNLF Consultations in Mindanao**

The MNLF Chairman, responding to public clamor for consultation, informed Ambassador Yan of his scheduled Islamic Democratic Consultations in Tawi-Tawi (March 21), South Cotabato and Davao (March 23), and Zamboanga City (April 2). He requested for clearance to bring along with him "200 members of the Bangsamoro Armed Forces (BAF) Security Force to serve as our escorts for the trip."<sup>11</sup>

The AFP did not agree with such a proposal, arguing that the presence of hundreds of armed men in urban areas will create unnecessary fear among the residents. The MNLF however insisted



on it by saying that the purpose of the 200 armed security escorts was for the protection of the MNLF Chairman and the members of his party.

This problem on security came close to a fatal incident when the MNLF Chairman finally decided to come to Cotabato City on April 1. Dr. Payakan Tilendo, President of the Polytechnic University and also Vice-Chairman of MNLF Support Committee on Education coordinated the visit. The invitation came from local leaders who requested for consultation with the MNLF. But local AFP authorities and some local leaders insisted that the visit was unannounced and therefore was without any clearance from the GRP Panel. The day happened to be Good Friday, a holy period for Christians. The incident heightened tension in Cotabato City when the MNLF arrived. But because the MNLF did not intend to disturb the peace, the Chairman agreed to be escorted by some AFP officers who volunteered to escort him to the City.

Though nothing untoward happened, the incident brought into focus the need to resolve the security issue for the MNLF Chairman. It took some time, however, to resolve the issue because the MNLF Chairman was still requesting clarification on the matter and even requested that the scheduled 2<sup>nd</sup> Mixed Committee in April be moved to Timbangan so that security problem could be avoided. The Joint Ceasefire Committee (JCC) managed however to resolve the issue before the Mixed Committee meeting took place in Zamboanga City in the first week of April.

### **Start of Support Committee Meetings**

Meanwhile, Support Committee meetings were held in Cotabato City (SC#1, Defense), Zamboanga City (SC#3, Economics and Finance) and Manila (SC# 4 and SC# 5) from January to March.

The **Support Committee #1** (Defense) meeting in Cotabato City lasted only one day. The MNLF Chairman who earlier sent word to attend the meeting, failed to come because security arrangements were not finalized on time. Because of his absence both Panels ended up exchanging position papers only on the following issues: 1) arrangements for the joining of the MNLF forces with the AFP; 2) setting up of the Special Regional Security Forces (SRSF) in the area

of autonomy; and 3) establishment of the Special Regional Security Force. In the succeeding meeting held in the Indonesian Embassy in Manila, the GRP Panel submitted six (6) points for discussion and for submission to the Formal Talks.

**Support Committee #2** (Education) which met in Zamboanga City from 6-7, January came up with priority agenda for further discussions and arrived at some consensus to be elevated to the Formal Talks for decision.

**Support Committee #3** (Economics) met in Zamboanga City twice, January 20-22 and February 3-4, came up with 9 agenda for discussions and later on arrived at 11 consensus points and 19 pending matters for further discussions in the Formal Talks.

**Support Committee #5** (Shariah) met in Marawi City on January 17-18 where both parties exchanged position papers and views on certain issues involving Shariah such as sources of Shariah Jurisprudence; Jurisdiction of Islamic Shariah Courts; Structure of the Islamic Shariah Courts; The Shariah Supreme Court; and the language in the Islamic Shariah Courts.

It should be relevant to mention here that the MNLF Panel was composed of Muslim *Ulama* (Religious leaders) who were graduates of Islamic Universities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia headed by Sharif Zain Jali.<sup>12</sup> Justice Undersecretary Demetrio Demetria headed the GRP Panel with some Muslim lawyers as members.

## **Second Mixed Committee Meeting**

The meeting was held in Zamboanga City from April 6-7, 1994.

Earlier in March, there was hesitation on the part of the GRP Panel to agree on Zamboanga City as the venue. In my report to Chairman Misuari dated March 17, 1994, I told him about my meeting with Congressman Ermita who presented to me the idea of holding the Mixed Committee Meeting in Subic, Zambales and that President Ramos had already cleared the idea. He said there would be no problem on security facilities and transportation. *And the President agreed.* But I argued against it, saying that the area had no significance and no meaning at all to the peace process aside from it being a former US facility.

Another issue we covered with Ermita in that meeting of March 9 was the planned visit of the MNLF Chairman to certain areas in Mindanao. From the way he explained his views, I felt that he was not really in favor of this Mindanao trip not because he did not like the Chairman to meet with the people but what he was apprehensive about was the possible negative reactions that may be unnecessarily generated as a result of the visit, similar to what happened in 1986. (Chairman Misuari then was allowed by President Aquino to travel around Mindanao with about 1,500 security escorts to make consultation with the people. There were negative reactions from many sectors in Mindanao).

Since the present political climate was democratic, where just anyone could question the Administration, Ermita preferred to proceed with the talks on a low-profile, slow, and non-controversial but sure manner.

Ambassador Rajab also did not favor the visit to Zamboanga City if time and resources were limited. And with the reluctance of GRP officials to address the question of security, the issue could not really be resolved without us doubting the intention and sincerity of some GRP officials. Ambassador Rajab even suggested that we move the meeting to Jakarta, Indonesia.

In my memorandum for the MNLF Chairman dated March 23, 1994, I told him about the overseas call I received from Ustadz Khabier Malik who called from Macca.

1. Ustadz Khabier said that Ambassador Mohsin and other OIC officials were informed by Jakarta of MNLF proposals as contained in the MNLF Chairman's letter of March 1 about the proposed venue of the Mixed Committee Meeting which includes holding the meeting on board a naval boat. Amb. Mohsin and other OIC officials did not feel comfortable with this proposed venue;
2. OIC officials preferred Zamboanga City as the meeting place and suggested that efforts should be exerted to ensure the holding of the meeting in Zamboanga City in order to avoid being blamed;
3. If there were problems on security arrangements, OIC diplomats could be invited to accompany the MNLF Chairman from Jolo to Zamboanga City in addition to the security arrangements to be allowed by the GRP;
4. If the meeting in Zamboanga City would not be possible, the OIC supports the idea of holding the meeting in Jakarta a few days before the start of the Second Round of Formal Talks.

In the letter of Ambassador Yan to the Indonesian Embassy dated 23 March 1994, he advised us that the GRP Panel was already seeking final presidential approval for *La Vista Del Mar* in Zamboanga City as the venue for the Second Mixed Committee Meeting in the Philippines and for appropriate security measures to be arranged.<sup>13</sup> This information was immediately relayed by the Indonesian Embassy to the MNLF Chairman in a letter dated March 24, 1994.

The MNLF Chairman responded to the letter from the Indonesian Embassy by saying, “*We appreciate very much your effort at reconciling the little kinks surrounding the choice of the venue, and for this please accept our congratulations. The venue of the meeting, which accordingly is a private resort of Congresswoman Lobregat, is acceptable to us. In fact we are appreciative of the Congresswoman’s goodwill by allowing us the use of her facilities.*”<sup>14</sup>

And so the Second Mixed Committee Meeting was finally held in Zamboanga City. The same parties came: the GRP Panel was headed by Ambassador Yan; the MNLF Panel was headed by Chairman Misuari; the OIC Secretary General was represented by Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin; and the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six was represented by Dr. Hassan Wirajuda of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. Other important participants were Libyan Ambassador Rajab Azzarouq of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Indonesian Ambassador to Manila Pieter Damanik.

As a gesture of goodwill and in support of the Peace Process, Congresswoman Maria Clara Lobregat, who was reported earlier to be opposed to the holding of the meeting in the city, came out to open her resort beach for the Opening Ceremony. The signing of the Joint Guidelines and Ground Rules for the implementation of the 1993 Interim Ceasefire Agreement (JGG) highlighted this historic event. The JGG spelled out the details in the relationship between GRP and MNLF forces, truce violations, procedures for the investigation thereof, and attendant sanctions.

In his opening statements, the MNLF Chairman declared the readiness of the MNLF to sign the JGG. He delved lengthily on the results of his consultations in Jolo, Tawi-Tawi, Cotabato, and Zamboanga.

In the plenary session that followed, the Mixed Committee

Meeting (MCM) reviewed the works of the Support Committees. The respective Chairmen were called to present their reports and to elaborate on certain items.

The MNLF Chairman commented that the GRP had not clarified its position on *Sharia'h* and had not responded yet to the MNLF position submitted on December 28, 1993 on the issue of Transition Implementing Structure and Mechanism. He also said that the GRP Panel was observed to have limited authority during Support Committee meetings.

The MCM also reviewed the works of the Support Committees on the following areas:

- Education: integration of Islamic values to the Philippine system of education.
- Economics and Finance: Islamic banking, revenue sharing schemes
- Administration and Representation in the National Government

There were also areas that remained unresolved and the MCM felt that in depth discussions were needed to forge mutual understanding. Nevertheless, the First MCM ended in an atmosphere of goodwill and optimism with all participants expressing confidence that the talks were ready to move forward with greater momentum.<sup>15</sup>

*May 14.* The MNLF Chairman then left for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The MNLF leaders in the ground, meanwhile, continued efforts to reach out to other groups to push the peace process forward. On May 7, 1994, MNLF and MILF leaders met in Maguindanao. The MILF declared support for the peace talks based on the Tripoli Agreement.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, in Manila, human rights groups sponsored the Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor (APCET) at the University of the Philippines. This event caused a diplomatic stir between Manila and Jakarta. The APCET supported the independence move of the people of East Timor, which was then part of Indonesia.

Also during this month, the GRP sent an *Aide Memoire* on the Status and Prospects of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks to the OIC Secretary General in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.<sup>17</sup> The said memoire was very significant as the GRP “acknowledges with gratitude the indispensable support and assistance of the OIC in the search for a lasting and comprehensive solution to the problem of Muslims in

Southern Philippines, particularly through the Formal Peace Talks between the GRP and the MNLF.”<sup>18</sup> It considered the signing of the Interim Ceasefire Agreement implemented under detailed system of Joint Guidelines and Ground rules as the first step in achieving the return of the MNLF into the national mainstream and eventually involving them in the vital security and development efforts in Southern Philippines. The document also mentioned “vital tasks facing the GRP, the MNLF, and the OIC such as sustained confidence building and political consolidation.”<sup>19</sup>

The effectiveness of the ceasefire and the task of confidence building were eventually put to a severe test in the events that transpired the following months.

### **Military Operations against the Abu Sayyaf (June to September 1994): A Test of GRP-MNLF Confidence Building Measures**

*June 3.* This writer was in Jolo when the military assault in Patikul began. At sunrise, “government troops launched air, sea and land attacks on the hideout of Abu Sayyaf Group in Lumbaan, Patikul, Sulu. More than 2,000 troops, backed by tanks, gunboats and helicopter gunships were thrown into the offensive.<sup>20</sup> They were combined elements of the AFP, PNP, and local militia. The military operation was dubbed ‘OPLAN TUGIS I’ to capture Abu Sayyaf leader Abdurajak Janjalani, dead or alive.”<sup>21</sup>

According to an MNLF report to the MNLF Chairman marked “Highly Confidential”:

At 0530H, 06-03-94, the AFP conducted military operations against the Abu Sayyaf at Lumbaan, Patikul, Lupah Sug (Sulu). Continuous shelling to the vicinity of Matang, Tanum, Kaunayan, Igasan and Lumbaan, using 105mm, 81mm, dropping of 18-500lb bombs from four OV10 and from two T-28 fighter planes, rocket launchers and machineguns fired from four helicopter gunship and pounding the areas and its coastal lanes by several naval boats. Additional landing of two battalion marines and army with a total of seven battalion excluding PNP and civilian volunteers. Expected today to attack Bud Pula. More than ten thousand civilians evacuated the area. Heavy casualties from both sides. From the AFP, 14 KIA and 27 WIA and from the Abu Sayyaf, 4 KIA and 5 WKI. According to Governor Loong, 22 civilians have been killed by the bombs and foot soldiers.”<sup>22</sup>

The area of Lumbaan in Patikul was acknowledged to be under

the control of Commander Raddulan Sahiron<sup>23</sup> and was also near the MNLF base under the command of MNLF senior leader Dr. Tham Manjoorsa.<sup>24</sup> According to MNLF reports on the ground, about seven battalions of soldiers were involved in the operations with naval and air support. The MNLF would report later that after due consultations with its leaders and the local AFP authorities, they “consented to the launching of the operations because it is within the contemplation of the ceasefire guidelines and ground rules.”<sup>25</sup> The MNLF was even reported to have assisted government troops in the operations by putting up checkpoints to block Abu Sayyaf elements from escaping as confirmed by Defense Secretary Renato De Villa.<sup>26</sup> MNLF Chairman Misuari was also reported to have condemned the Abu Sayyaf as criminal elements and that government troops have the right to run after them as allowed in the ceasefire agreement.<sup>27</sup>

*June 6.* After three days of intense fighting, the military claimed to have overrun the Abu Sayyaf camp, which they called Patikul Hill. Accordingly, the Abu Sayyaf fought back with mortar and artillery fire but retreated into the interior after suffering 35 dead while the AFP also admitted to have suffered several casualties.<sup>28</sup> According to an MNLF report, the son of an MNLF local leader residing in the area was killed and three others were wounded when they opted to put up a fight against incoming government troops instead of leaving their homes. In another MNLF report, it was stated:

A pregnant woman, resident of Kan Imlan, Patikul, died of shock after giving birth to twins while fleeing the intense fighting on June 3; another resident of Liyang, Patikul, died on the spot and his companion wounded, due to heavy fire from government troops on June 8; hundreds of civilians fled their homes leaving their belongings, farm implements and animals unattended; and the GRP troops were observed to have expanded their areas of operations.<sup>29</sup>

In the evening of June 5, a car bomb exploded in downtown Zamboanga City inflicting heavy damage to commercial buildings.<sup>30</sup> The bomb was so powerful that it was heard within five kilometers from the center and injured at least 36 persons.<sup>31</sup> In nearby Basilan on June 8, the Abu Sayyaf group was also reported to have abducted 70 people including 13 public school teachers and a Priest, Fr. Cirilo Nacorda. Fifteen of the hostages, identified as Christians, were executed on the same day.<sup>32</sup> These barbaric and un-Islamic acts of the Abu Sayyaf drew the condemnations even of the Muslim

communities.<sup>33</sup> The kidnappers demanded ransom for the hostages but then President Ramos flatly rejected the Abu Sayyaf's demands and instead placed Sulu and Basilan under a 'state of calamity' and ordered the release of P2 million to assist families displaced during the military offensives.<sup>34</sup> He rejected proposals to declare the two provinces under an emergency situation.<sup>35</sup>

In General Santos City, another powerful bomb exploded in a shopping complex killing 3 and wounding 25 others.<sup>36</sup> All of these were attributed to Abu Sayyaf elements prompting the AFP to launch another massive assault against these rebels in Basilan.<sup>37</sup> In Zamboanga City, an alleged Abu Sayyaf leader, Asmad Abdul,<sup>38</sup> was cornered by the police in the evening of June 10 in the presence of his wife, in a hotel near the City's Airport. He was later found dead with a bullet wound to his head. According to Police authorities, Abdul grabbed the gun of the police and in retaliation he was fired upon.<sup>39</sup>

As the military operations intensified, tensions began to rise among the civilian population. The Catholic Bishop of Basilan warned, "The possibility is very strong for a Christian-Muslim conflict" and demanded a government crackdown on the extremists.<sup>40</sup> The Basilan Church leaders also asked, "Why did the hostage-taking and massacre occur despite the double alert on the island? Why was the Abu Sayyaf, which had supposedly been decimated and whose camp had reportedly been overrun by government forces, able to kidnap and kill a lot of people?"<sup>41</sup> Then "in the nearby barangay of Matarling, unidentified gunmen ambushed a cargo truck and wounded three Muslim men in the same area where the Abu Sayyaf killed the 15 Christian hostages, according to police report."<sup>42</sup>

An MNLF report from Basilan confirmed the incident and even added:

June 17, a Muslim-owned passenger jeepney was ambushed resulting in the death of 6 persons and the wounding of 8 others, all Muslims; on June 20, Christian vigilantes killed a Muslim and burned his house; June 21, a commercial truck was ambushed in Lantawan resulting in the wounding of three persons one of whom was a Christian.<sup>43</sup>

The names of the dead and the wounded were listed in the said report. Later, 20 hostages were released after the ransom payment of P200,000 but the rest remained with the Abu Sayyaf including Fr.



Nacorda.<sup>44</sup>

In the face of these violent incidents, the GRP and MNLF Panels continued to remain confident that the talks could still proceed. The MNLF continued to extend cooperation to the military operations in Basilan and Sulu in accordance with Guidelines and Ground Rules of the Ceasefire Agreement. Then President Ramos even directed the GRP Panel “to speed up peace talks with the MNLF even as he welcomed the statements of MNLF Chairman Misuari condemning the Abu Sayyaf.”<sup>45</sup> President Ramos was even reported to have issued a statement saying:

I hail Chairman Misuari’s recent statement from Saudi Arabia condemning all terrorist acts in Basilan. (He) has the clear perception that the ongoing peace process, as well as the ceasefire agreement forged between the government and the MNLF in November last year, is holding and should not be jeopardized by the atrocious murder and abduction of innocent civilians in Basilan perpetrated by the Abu Sayyaf.<sup>46</sup>

Reacting to the warning of the Basilan Church leaders that the massacre of 15 Christians by Abu Sayyaf radicals could spark Muslim-Christian war, President Ramos said, “I think they are exaggerated. There are enough cool heads and moderate-minded people there, both on the Christian as well as the Muslim side, who want to see peace rein in the South.”<sup>47</sup>

The GRP confidence on the MNLF cooperation was bolstered by reports of MNLF public declaration that they will not give sanctuary to fleeing Abu Sayyaf.<sup>48</sup> The MNLF even unconditionally allowed the safe pull-out of PNP elements they captured in a misencounter<sup>49</sup> “as a demonstration of MNLF goodwill and in deference to the GRP-MNLF Ceasefire Agreement.”<sup>50</sup>

In my report to the MNLF Chairman dated June 22, I mentioned to him my meeting with Ambassador Yan where I emphasized the tense situation in Patikul and Basilan because of the massive military operations; the plight of the refugees who had fled their homes for safety and now desired to get back to their homes due to economic difficulties; and the fact that this situation did not fit well in our mutual desire to improve confidence building and foster an atmosphere conducive to the peace talks. Ambassador Yan told me in return that the GRP Panel would discuss the matter with AFP officials so that the operations could be terminated as instructed by

President Ramos. He also informed me that they were thinking of proposing to convene the joint meetings of the Support committees and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting in the country before the resumption of the Formal Talks in Jakarta.

At this juncture, it would be relevant to include here the analysis of the situation made by the MNLF Secretariat at the height of the military operations against the Abu Sayyaf as follows:

THE ABU SAYYAF CRISIS: ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE MNLF.  
Manila, 18 June 1994.

Will the MNLF come out “victorious” or “gentleman” in the bloody charade that is the Abu Sayyaf Crisis.? Opinions in the Homeland and in the mainstream Manila media are varied.

If the MNLF plays its card wisely and smartly, it will emerge “victorious” or even stronger out of the current imbroglio in Patikul and Basilan. If anything, the on-going military operations have conclusively pointed out that military might alone cannot not establish law and order. The military operations have also brought to the surface the socio-economic and political aspects of the problem that are peculiar to the Bangsamoro areas. This has led many people to realize the futility of applying military solution to the Bangsamoro problem.

There are some who scoffed at the humiliation of the military by simply asking: If our military is too weak to lick a small group like the Abu Sayyaf, how can it face the MNLF in war?

The goodwill and high expectations vis-à-vis the MNLF in the public opinion has so far reaped political dividends. President Ramos, at the height of the military operations, directed Ambassador Yan to take steps in facilitating the second round of the Formal Talks between the GRP and MNLF. Many officials have seconded the Ramos directive. Even Firdausi Abbas, who is not so fond of making positive statements about the MNLF, was quoted by Manila newspapers to have called for the resumption of the formal talks between the GRP and MNLF and he went further to say that only the MNLF can solve the problem like the Abu Sayyaf.

There are many opinions in Manila claiming that the only group in the area that has the capacity and capability to establish law and order is the MNLF. Many believed that if the MNLF wanted it, it could easily crumple or neutralize the Abu Sayyaf.

On the other hand, a contrary opinion has also surfaced in the past few days. The crisis brought about by the Abu Sayyaf, they say, has the effect

of making the MNLF irrelevant. Holders of this view anchored their argument on the proposition that the Abu Sayyaf is a rival power and thus, competes for the loyalty of the Muslims side by side with the MNLF. And because Abu Sayyaf answers the longing of the Muslims for Islam, it will in due time dislodge the MNLF from the consciousness and support of the great majority of the Muslim masses in Mindanao.

Where is the MNLF, many are asking? Can the MNLF sit in the sidelines while thousands of innocent residents of Patikul and Basilan have been uprooted from their homes and the enemy continues to put up the detachments and stock war materials in the MNLF controlled areas?

Many are of the view that the MNLF must make its presence felt, and felt strongly in the current situation. For one, the MNLF could express its concern on the plight of the thousands of evacuees and call on the people of Sulu and Basilan to give assistance and succor to the victims of the battles. Another, it could, it should warn on the disastrous and catastrophic consequence of the escalation of the battles especially on the peace process. Or it could call on the Philippine leadership to demonstrate high sense of statesmanship by putting an end to the policy of using a hammer to kill a mosquito.<sup>51</sup>

Regarding this so-called mis-encounter between GRP and MNLF forces, an MNLF report stated that:<sup>52</sup>

36 members of the Special Action Force (SAF) of the PNP were observed to have intruded into the MNLF controlled area in Fuente Eggas, Sampinit in the morning of June 15. Despite the established boundary with signboards installed by the MNLF troops in accordance with the understanding in the Joint Ceasefire Committee, the SAF elements continued to intrude further into the area. To the MNLF troops then, that movement of the SAF was a clear violation of the agreement. A firefight then ensued which lasted for 15 minutes after which the SAF opted to surrender. After interrogation and inventory by the MNLF, the 36 PNP elements had three officers with them with the rank of Majors and they carried heavy weapons such as 3 bazookas, 3 M60 Sub-machine guns, 3 M16 (double-body), M14s and Armalites and other special firearms fully equipped with telescope. The PNP suffered one dead and three wounded while the MNLF did not have any casualty. The incident was immediately reported to the Military Authorities through the Ceasefire Committee. After several hours of negotiation, the MNLF agreed to release the captured PNP elements through the assistance of the Joint Ceasefire Committee. A military helicopter then was dispatched to the area five times to airlift the dead and wounded and the rest of the PNP elements.

Referring to this incident, Sharif Zain Jali, speaking for the MNLF said, "Today's incident is just a minor issue and should not

affect our peace talks.”<sup>53</sup> Then AFP’s Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Arturo Enrile “described the clash as a result of an honest mistake by both parties [because] the zoning is very clear on the map but difficult to determine on the ground.”<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, military operations continued in Basilan as more Philippine Marine troops moved into the area to pursue the Abu Sayyaf.<sup>55</sup> But the captive Fr. Nacorda sent a word appealing “to the military to stop offensives against the bandits, fearing he might be caught in the crossfire.”<sup>56</sup> Muslim organizations in Metro Manila held prayer rallies and Muslim-Christian groups did the same in Davao City “calling for a stop to the ongoing military operations in order not to provoke a Muslim-Christian war.”<sup>57</sup> Then AFP’s Chief of Staff, Gen. Enrile, responded positively to these appeals as he ordered a temporary suspension of the military operations to give one last chance to the negotiations for the release of Fr. Nacorda.<sup>58</sup>

The negotiations failed and the AFP consequently launched its “final assault.”<sup>59</sup> Over 7,000 government troops using heavy weapons with air and naval support were mobilized against “a small armed band, hardly one hundred strong.”<sup>60</sup>

But even with this heavy military assault, the Abu Sayyaf still managed to flee from their hideout after suffering 15 dead and inflicting heavy casualties on the Philippine Marines (2 officers and 4 enlisted men dead and 13 wounded). The Abu Sayyaf Camp was also overrun.<sup>61</sup>

Amidst this continuing escalation of military operations in Basilan and Sulu, the call for peace also intensified. Peace Rallies continued in Metro Manila and Muslim and Christian leaders also met in Cotabato City calling for religious solidarity.<sup>62</sup> MNLF Chairman Misuari, calling from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, appealed to the Government and the Abu Sayyaf to stop fighting.<sup>63</sup>

Muslim government, religious and civic leaders from Sulu also “called on all Filipino Islamic faithful to help combat the extremists Abu Sayyaf group whose continued existence...could weaken Islam and imperil innocent Muslims.”<sup>64</sup>

However, reports of MNLF coddling Abu Sayyaf elements continued to persist in the media. This prompted Congressman Ermita, who was, then in the United States, to say, “Let’s not drag MNLF to war.”<sup>65</sup> President Ramos himself “downplayed reports that

some armed fighters of the MNLF have joined forces with the Abu Sayyaf.”<sup>66</sup>

*July 1994.* One month of continued military operations in Basilan and Sulu did not produce any decisive military victory for the AFP and PNP over the Abu Sayyaf. Instead, the situation in the ground became complicated.

In my report to the MNLF Chairman dated July 3 and entitled, “Current Situation—Assessment and Recommendations,” which was the result of a series of meetings held in Jolo and Timbangan by the MNLF Leadership in the ground, it was concluded that:

- The military offensive against the Abu Sayyaf (which the GRP called police action), is now believed designed to gain ground particularly strategic areas controlled by the MNLF on the pretext of pursuing criminals (hot pursuit operations) under the guise of legal police action as stipulated in the JCC groundrules. The AFP continues to pour in additional troops and war materials and planned to expand areas of operations.
- Damages to civilian properties and loss of lives continue to increase not to mention those directly own by the MNLF. MNLF properties with MNLF markings were ransacked and destroyed; farm implements and animals were taken by soldiers.
- The MNLF ground forces cannot move effectively. MNLF movements may be viewed as violation of the ceasefire and the MNLF might be portrayed in the media as the villain in the event of an escalation of the conflict.
- The cooperation and accommodation extended by local MNLF units and commanders through constant meetings with AFP counterparts and by giving way to incoming AFP troops but not necessarily supporting AFP actions, have been blatantly abused and may have been perceived by the AFP as weakness of the MNLF.

On the same day, the MNLF Secretariat received a report from the State Chairman of the MNLF in Sulu reporting the landing of about 100 government troops in Maimbung area without informing their MNLF counterpart in accordance with the JCC guidelines and groundrules. Maimbung is the MNLF Landing point. The MNLF was preparing to make countermoves.<sup>67</sup>

“This anti-Abu Sayyaf campaign has raised some doubts about the AFP’s real objective or target,” wrote the MNLF Chairman in his letter to Ambassador Damanik.<sup>68</sup> “What caused some anxiety among our people and the MNLF leadership,” continued the MNLF Chairman in the said letter, “is the ground report indicating that the Philippine Armed Forces, after seizing the Abu Sayyaf camps in Patikul and Sampinit, are still holding on to those camps and are giving no signs of their intention to leave.”

After mentioning what he believed were incidents of ceasefire violations by the GRP forces, he nevertheless said, “the MNLF as usual has put up with them stoically, in deference to our commitment to the ceasefire and to prevent derailment of the peace process.” Relative to the military operations, the MNLF Chairman submitted to the Indonesian Ambassador, among others, the following proposals:<sup>69</sup>

- The convening of the Joint Ceasefire Committee meeting to assess the situation and recall the agreement to allow the coming of an OIC Ceasefire Observer Team
- The withdrawal of AFP forces from the territory taken during the anti-Abu Sayyaf campaign in Patikul and Sampinit
- The lifting of AFP’s naval and air blockades around coastal and air space of Sulu and Basilan in the spirit of the ceasefire
- The redressing of legitimate grievances of the innocent Bangsamoro civilians adversely affected by the military offensives.

On July 5, it was intimated to the MNLF leadership in Sulu that officials of the Provincial Government of Sulu led by Governor Tupay Loong met with top military and National Defense Officials in the Sulu Provincial Capitol. In that meeting, the Sulu officials expressed their serious concerns about the Abu Sayyaf threat and wished for an early settlement to the GRP-MNLF negotiations.

Governor Loong was reported to have proposed the idea of expanding the present ARMM to include Basilan, Marawi City, Muslim-dominated areas in South Cotabato, the 2<sup>nd</sup> District of Lanao del Norte, Muslim-dominated areas in Zamboanga del Sur and

Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga City, and Muslim-dominated areas in South Palawan. Even if these areas were subjected to the constitutional process, the yes vote would prevail because of the predominance of the Muslim population.

Governor Loong, according to the MNLF intelligence report, even committed to give a chance to MNLF Chairman Misuari "to lead us...we will allow him to run for Regional Governor unopposed as a compromise for peace by all politicians"<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, in addition to the hot pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf in Basilan and Sulu, the government started looking at another angle: foreign support to the Abu Sayyaf. The military now began to monitor the 'suspicious' movements of Pakistanis and Arab nationals in Zamboanga.<sup>71</sup> The Muslim Embassies in Manila promptly denied the report and the Embassy of Iran even filed a diplomatic note with the Department of Foreign Affairs regarding the said report.<sup>72</sup> President Ramos also ordered a probe on this report.<sup>73</sup> And despite earlier reports of GRP and MNLF cooperation in the military operations against the Abu Sayyaf, there were now reports of ceasefire violations and both parties were set to submit official protests during their official meetings.<sup>74</sup>

At the same time, in Sulu, the Philippine Marines continued to press their hot pursuit operations against the Abu Sayyaf whom they believed were still encamped in certain strategic areas in Maimbung Municipality. In two successive letters sent by Marine Col. Teofilo V. Delos Santos Jr.,<sup>75</sup>

Chairman of GRP Sulu Provincial Ceasefire Committee, to his MNLF counterpart both dated July 28, 1994, he requested the MNLF "to advise their forces in Maimbung to vacate or give way to the GRP forces on 31 July undertaking normal police and military actions"<sup>76</sup> against suspected Abu Sayyaf elements.

The MNLF granted the request and on July 31, "the military and the police...again launched land, sea and air operations aimed to flush out Abu Sayyaf group in Sulu...Col. Ponciano Millena<sup>77</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Brigade Commander, heads the 2,000 government troops assigned to get Janjalani and his followers numbering 100 to 150."<sup>78</sup>

The MNLF would report later, "there was no combat engagement recorded in the said operation; the Abu Sayyaf was on the run...but succeeded in eluding GRP forces that had been searching for them

in the countryside of Jolo.”<sup>79</sup>

### **The Kidnapping and Rescue of Fr. Bertelsman**

But on July 31, the day GRP troops launched Oplan Tugis II to pursue the Abu Sayyaf in the countryside, a daring kidnapping incident took place inside the town. At about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, armed men wearing military uniforms entered the Chapel located right within the confines of the Sulu PNP Headquarters and forced American Priest, Fr. Clarence Bertelsman, to come with them.

The MNLF took immediate action when informed by the military about the incident. The vehicle carrying the armed men and the American priest was stopped at the MNLF checkpoint in Timbangan. The kidnappers opened fire and when the MNLF retaliated, the firefight lasted for about 20 minutes. The result: Fr. Bertelsmann was wounded; two MNLF guards were slightly wounded; one kidnapper died on the spot and another one was wounded but later died in the hospital in the evening; another one was found in the morning, seriously wounded, and died later before the Ambulance came. In addition, two dead kidnappers were dragged by their comrades and successfully escaped the scene. One of those who escaped was Commander Robot<sup>80</sup> who was believed to have been seriously wounded in that firefight.

These daring rescue actions taken by the MNLF and the immediate turnover of the victim to government authorities drew praises from their GRP counterparts in Jolo. The two Marine officers (Col. Millena and Lt. Col. Delos Santos) were reported to have confessed to MNLF ceasefire officials in Jolo “that they no longer had doubts in their minds about the MNLF stand on the Abu Sayyaf as a result of the incident. They were highly impressed by MNLF performance and were now supportive of Misuari and the MNLF in its quest for peace in Mindanao.”<sup>81</sup>

The incident became ‘good copy’ in the media the following day.

This incident very dramatically showed the sincerity of the MNLF in cooperating with the GRP to curb kidnappings and other forms of lawlessness in Sulu and other parts of Mindanao. No less than then President Ramos acknowledged the role played by MNLF Commander Alandoni Hassan and the MNLF Ceasefire Committee Members.<sup>82</sup> Ramos said, “The incident underscores the importance of close coordination between the government and the citizenry in



preserving the peace.”

On August 4, Ambassador Yan wrote MNLF Chairman Misuari through the MNLF Secretariat citing the official statements issued by President Ramos and informing the MNLF of the statements he issued to the Press on August 3, which among others stated that:

- The successful rescue of Fr. Clarence William Bertelsman in Timbangan, Indanan, Sulu last July 31 affirms the validity and effectiveness of the Interim Ceasefire Agreement entered into by the Philippine Government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in Jakarta, Indonesia in November last year.”
- We also wish to acknowledge the leadership of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, who has remained steadfast to his commitments under the ceasefire accord. With such commitment and cooperation shown by the MNLF, there is no doubt that the peace process will move steadily forward towards a lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict in Southern Philippines.”

Again on August 8, in Basilan, Fr. Nacorda, who had been in the hands of the Abu Sayyaf since June 8, was released by his kidnappers to MNLF Commander Jan Jakilan of Basilan. The release was made possible due to an earlier negotiations conducted discreetly by Congressman Ermita who personally received Fr. Nacorda from the MNLF forces in an undisclosed place in Basilan. Congressman Ermita later said, “The participation of the MNLF in securing the release of Fr. Nacorda should erase any doubt about its sincerity in the peace efforts.”<sup>83</sup>

Referring to the complaints earlier aired by the MNLF, Congressman Ermita “expressed the belief that the complaints of both sides about alleged ceasefire violations would be resolved satisfactorily and therefore would cease to be a hindrance to the peace talks.”<sup>84</sup> Then he said, “The release of Fr. Nacorda with the participation of the MNLF—that will be a positive sign that Misuari will be disposed to agree to already resume the talks in Jakarta.”<sup>85</sup>

And so both parties seemed to have passed the acid test of sincerity: the GRP showed flexibility in dealing with lawless elements without dragging the MNLF; the MNLF, on the other hand, displayed adherence to the Ceasefire Agreement. They also cooperated with the AFP and PNP in the hot pursuit of those who were considered criminals and had even acted without any reservation against those

criminals. Both parties then prepared to face each other in the presence of the OIC for the Second Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta.

### **Back to Jakarta, Indonesia: The Second Round of Formal Talks, September 1-5, 1994**

The Formal meeting was preceded by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting following the procedure adopted in the First Round of Formal Talks. In this meeting, the MNLF Panel had expressed their concern on the slow progress of SC# 1 (Defense) and SC#5 (Shariah). The MNLF Chairman even made it very clear that as far as the MNLF was concerned, the results of the previous Support Committee and Mixed Committee meetings were “just raw materials” and not final. The results would be brought to the Formal Talks. The Chairman had even emphasized that the document signed by SC# 5 in Manila was not final.

Because of this observation, the MCM came up with Working Groups to meet separately. The Working groups were composed of the Chairmen of each Support Committee with additional members, to review the results of the previous meetings. In the sessions that followed during the day, the consensus points submitted with additional points that came out in the discussion were approved for submission to the Formal Talks.

On the issue of OIC Monitoring/Observer Teams to be sent to Southern Philippines, the MNLF proposed a Team of 40 officers and men while the GRP proposed 8. The parties agreed to elevate the issue to the Formal Talks.

In the meeting of the Working Group on Shariah, the MNLF submitted a new proposal in lieu of those discussed in earlier meetings, which stated:

The Autonomous Government shall establish Shariah Courts in the Area of Autonomy. The Regional Legislative Assembly shall prescribe and define the powers, authority, jurisdiction and structure of the Shariah Courts.<sup>86</sup>

The GRP Panel saw the wisdom of the proposal, but said that legislative power is vested in Congress. The MNLF Panel maintained that their proposal is constitutional and suggested that the issue be elevated to the Mixed Committee.<sup>87</sup>

In the Mixed Committee meeting that followed, the GRP Panel

agreed to the MNLF proposal but with an addendum: “*subject to the approval and appropriate actions by Congress and/or the Supreme Court of the Republic of the Philippines.*”<sup>88</sup> The MNLF Panel appreciated the positive response of the GRP Panel to their proposal but reserved their comment on the addendum in the Formal Talks.<sup>89</sup>

In the Report of the Chairman of the Mixed Committee, a note appeared to the MNLF proposal as follows:

Taking note of the Assurances of the GRP Panel Chairman H.E. Manuel T. Yan before this plenary that the GRP, by virtue of Paragraph 16 Article III of the Tripoli Agreement, the GRP will undertake to comply with legislative process in order to facilitate implementation of the herein agreement.<sup>90</sup>

The 8 points of consensus in SC# 5 (Shariah) were agreed upon to be submitted to the Formal Talks. The new MNLF proposal was also considered for elevation to the Formal Session.

**Formal Sessions.** Drawing from the lessons learned in the past meetings, the objectives of the Second Round of Formal Talks were in the words of Ambassador Wiryono “to make further progress and work within a definite time-table.”<sup>91</sup>

The approach adopted was “to discuss the less difficult problem first.”<sup>92</sup> The agenda as discussed in the Mixed Committee Meeting held earlier were prioritized as follows:

Cease-fire, education, Judiciary and Shariah law for the first day; issues on transition implementing structure and mechanism on the second day; the third and fourth days would be confined to the remaining issues on the Economic and Financial systems, Representation in Government, Legislative Assembly and the Executive Council; the last day would be confined again to issues on implementing structure and mechanism.”<sup>93</sup>

It was emphasized also by Ambassador Wiryono as suggested by Minister Alatas that enough time should be spent on the crucial issue of the implementing structure and mechanism for the provisional government.

The five-day formal talks were therefore divided into 12 sessions. In between these formal sessions, Working groups were created composed of five representatives from each party chaired by the OIC representative, to discuss the details of the prioritized agenda and submit the same to the Plenary Session for decision.<sup>94</sup>

Discussions on the various agenda went smoothly. But the issue on Shariah, as earlier discussed in the Mixed Committee, again generated strong exchanges of positions. At the end of that particular session, the Chairman of the Formal Talks (Ambassador Wiryono) concluded that “the work of the SC#5 (Shariah) basically approved all points except for a portion on the implementation of the Shariah and the Judicial System.”<sup>95</sup>

In another session on Shariah, Ambassador Yan reassured the MNLF Panel that Congress would pass the Act enabling the Regional Legislative Assembly to establish Shariah Courts, that the Congressional Enabling Act would give the Regional Legislative Assembly the right to set up new Shariah Courts, and that would this would therefore determine the modalities of the existing Shariah Courts. The proposal, Yan posited, was put forward simply to facilitate the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement therefore ensuring the authority of the Regional Legislative Assembly to establish new Shariah Courts.”<sup>96</sup>

MNLF Chairman Misuari “lauded Ambassador Yan’s explanation and suggested that the footnote to the MNLF proposal (as indicated earlier) should be made part of the agreement. He stressed, however, the need to entrust the responsibility of establishing Shariah Courts to the Autonomous Government.”<sup>97</sup>

Then the Chairman of the Formal Talks, Ambassador Wiryono, provided a recap and concluded that all points discussed in Support Committee 5 (Shariah and Judiciary) had been concluded and agreed upon.”<sup>98</sup>

On the issue of Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism (Provisional Government), the GRP Panel pointed to three important events in the timetable, namely: 1) the congressional election in March 1995; 2) the termination of the ARMM’s mandate in March 1996; and 3) the National Elections in May 1998.

It was during this session that Ambassador Yan presented a proposal to the MNLF for the creation by the President of an Advisory Council which would consist of MNLF and business sector representatives to enable the MNLF to participate in political and socio-economic development in Southern Philippines.”<sup>99</sup>

Chairman Misuari responded by saying that such an advisory body was not provided in the Tripoli Agreement.<sup>100</sup> But Wiryono stated that the Advisory Council could also function as a forum for each Panel to build confidence and the MNLF Panel could draw its own plan and submit it to the President for approval and implementation, and to this Ambassador Yan agreed.<sup>101</sup>

Misuari requested time to consult the members of the MNLF Panel on this very important issue.<sup>102</sup> In the consultation meeting, Abu Amri Taddik, member of the MNLF Delegation, was heard by everybody saying that the offer of the "Advisory Council" by the GRP could be a trap to the MNLF. The MNLF Delegation then, after deliberating on the issue, came out with a negative response to the GRP proposal.

As the session resumed, the GRP reiterated their proposal on the Advisory Council, and proposed to call the body the 'Advisory Executive Council'. The MNLF suggested 'MNLF-OIC-GRP Preparatory Commission' emphasizing on the importance of involving the OIC. The GRP Panel however, argued that it was an internal matter and the presence of the OIC would not be necessary. The session did not produce any agreement.

The issue was put again to discussion in the final session. The GRP Panel stated that the proposed 'Advisory Council' was approved by the President to introduce the MNLF leadership to the political mainstream, that the preparatory works leading to the setting up of the Autonomous Government was only one of the works of the Advisory Council, and that the Chairman of the Council would be given the rank of a member of the Cabinet and as Adviser to the President on matters pertaining to the Autonomous Government.<sup>103</sup>

The MNLF Panel however argued that the works of the Advisory Council is not internal as this was the work of all parties involved in the Talks. The GRP Panel countered that the work of the Presidential Advisory Body was to advise the President with respect to general political governance and domestic affairs of the country.<sup>104</sup> The discussion again did not produce any agreement as the MNLF Chairman asked to be given time to consult the members of the MNLF Delegation.

The Formal Talks finally ended without resolving the issue on the Advisory Council. The MNLF Chairman sent a letter to President

Ramos dated September 7, 1994 “expressing thanks to Your Excellency concerning the GRP Panel’s offer of ‘Advisory Council’ for membership by MNLF dignitaries with the end in view to enhance the peace process. As of the present we are immersed in so much works, hence, we are of the belief that we might not be able to render justice to the trust called for by such office.”<sup>105</sup>

The 1994 Interim Agreement was however signed with the following features:

- 2 Points on Education
- 16 points on Economics and Finance and Mines and Minerals
- 19 Points on Administrative System, Representation in the National Government, Legislative Assembly and Executive Council.
- 5 points on the Implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement which included the immediate dispatch of OIC Monitoring/Observer Mission to be initially composed of 15 Indonesian Officers to help the GRP-MNLF Joint Ceasefire Committee in the implementation of the 1993 Ceasefire Agreement and the 1994 Joint Guidelines and Ground rules.
- The Support Committee and the Mixed Committee shall continue to meet in the Philippines to deliberate on the outstanding issues in preparation of the Third Round of Formal Talks.
- The Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Setting-Up of the Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism shall continue to meet in the Philippines to work towards the resolution of the pending issues.

Agreements reached on Shariah and Judiciary were not included in the 1994 Interim Agreement. But the Joint Communiqué stated, “In the areas of implementation of the Judiciary and Shariah Law and Education, there has been complete agreement reached.”<sup>106</sup>

### **Presence of OIC Ceasefire Observers—Constitutional or Not?**

Back in Manila, some “nationalists, particularly those in the Senate,” viewed the coming of OIC Ceasefire Observers as amounting to “foreign intervention.” Senators Wigberto Tanada and Rodolfo Biazon maintained that the entry of Indonesian troops, whether in uniform or in mufti, required approval by bilateral treaty as provided in the Constitution.”<sup>107</sup>

They were referring to Section 25 Article XVIII of the 1987

Constitution which provided that: "After expiration in 1991 of the agreement between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America concerning military bases, foreign military bases, troops, or facilities, shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate."

A Joint Public Hearing was conducted in the Senate by the Committee on Peace, Unification and Reconciliation and the Committee on National Defense and Security, chaired by Senators Rodolfo Biazon and Orlando Mercado respectively, on September 14, 1994. One of the resource persons invited was Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman of the GRP Panel Negotiating with the MNLF.

In that said hearing, Senator Biazon expressed his support for the peace process as he "considers the success of the peace process paramount to our economic, political and social well-being..." but made known his stand that "right or wrong, the Constitution must be upheld."<sup>108</sup>

Senator Biazon clarified that the basic issue to be resolved in the hearing was "whether or not their presence, being Indonesian military officers or foreign military officers, was a violation of the Constitution in relation to the provisions of Section 25, Article 18 of the 1987 Constitution."<sup>109</sup>

Ambassador Yan, on the other hand, responding to the various questions from the Senators, argued that the Tripoli Agreement and the obligations of the Government to implement the same (citing the official instructions from President Ramos to the GRP Panel) were valid; that the presence of the OIC Observer Team was not in violation of the Constitution and was precisely based on the Tripoli Agreement which the government adhered to; that the OIC Observers did not fall within the definition of foreign troops not allowed in the country by the Constitution because these OIC Observers would not deal directly with government troops but with the Joint Ceasefire Committee; that they would not be permanently stationed here; and that they would not be armed except with short firearms for personal security."

Senator Orlando Mercado, who was Chairman of the Senate Committee on National Defense and Adviser to the GRP Panel negotiating with the MNLF had earlier (September 8, 1994) issued

an official statement to the Press saying, “The agreement on the Indonesian ceasefire observers does NOT violate the constitutional provision for the simple reason that the clear context of the latter is basing of foreign military facilities in the Philippines. Furthermore, according to Constitutional Commissioner Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J., ‘While it is not explicitly so stated in Section 25, the clear intention of the Commission was to allow possible local deployment of only American forces.’ The case of the Indonesian ceasefire observers is an entirely different context.”<sup>110</sup>

This position was supported by Justice Secretary Franklin Drilon who was reported to have said, “The presence in the country of Indonesian military officials who will monitor the ceasefire agreement between the GRP and MNLF will not violate the Constitution.”<sup>111</sup>

Even Senator Biazon was reported to have made a 180-degree turn as a result of the Joint Senate Hearing when he “conceded there was nothing unconstitutional in Indonesian military officials coming here to monitor the ceasefire in Mindanao between the government and the MNLF.. his Committee, along with the Senate Committee on National Defense...have come to this conclusion based on the opinion rendered on the issue by the Senate legal division and authorities of the defunct Constitutional Commission led by Fr. Joaquin Bernas.”<sup>112</sup>

Then on September 24, the first three of 40 Indonesian military observers arrived in the country.<sup>113</sup> They were headed by Brig. Gen. Asmardi Arbi of the Indonesian Armed Forces.

### **GRP-MNLF Ad-Hoc Working Group Meeting in Zamboanga City**

As agreed in the Jakarta Formal Talks, the GRP-MNLF Ad-Hoc Working Group met at the Garden Orchids Hotel, Zamboanga City from November 28 to 30, 1994.

The GRP Panel was headed by then DILG Undersecretary Alexander P. Aguirre. MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari failed to arrive on time because of bad weather. He designated Dr. Mashur Jundam to head the MNLF Panel.

The OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six was represented by Minister Susanto Ismodirdjo of the Indonesian Embassy who served as Chairman of the meeting.



Observers noted that the meeting was marked by “cordiality and optimism,” as Secretary Aguirre was quoted to have said, “I can say without fear of contradiction that the prospects for peace are much brighter now than ever before.”<sup>114</sup>

Aguirre also said in his opening remarks, “We are prepared not only to present our position but also to consider the proposals of our MNLF counterparts. We are ready to accommodate them without reservation or limitation, provided we comply with the constitutional processes and that our actions should be within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines.”<sup>115</sup>

The GRP Panel presented a “GRP Position Paper” with the title ‘Guiding Principles Governing the Transitional Implementing Mechanism and Structure.’ The GRP Principles were presented based on the assumptions that “the Peace Agreement shall have been concluded with the final agreements in place.” It contained the following:

1. Features of the Transitional Implementing Mechanism:
  - i) “Enabling Act” enacted by the Congress of the Philippines incorporating the agreements reached in the peace process, including a transitory provision that mandates the creation of a Transitional Implementing Structure.
  - ii) Conduct of the plebiscite/referendum in the areas of autonomy
  - iii) Installation of the Transitional Implementing Structure to be jibed with the end of the term of the incumbent ARMM officials.
2. Features of the Transitional Implementing Structure:
  - i) Said structure shall consist of the following: Chairman; Vice Chairman; Cabinet; regular civil servants (staffs)
  - ii) The Transitional Implementing Structure has the following functions:
    - (a) Prepare for the elections of the officials of the autonomy, as Deputy of the Commission on elections (COMELEC)
    - (b) Administer the transitional affairs of the autonomy
3. Election/Installation of the Officials of the New Autonomous Government
4. Features of the Structure of the New Autonomous Government
 

**Executive Branch:**

Governor      Elected at large in the areas of autonomy.

Vice Governor

Cabinet - appointed by the Governor, with the consent of the  
Legislative Assembly

**Legislative Branch:**

Regional Legislative Assembly - elected by districts

**Judicial Branch:**

Regular Courts and Shariah Courts

Attached to this document was the Chart of the “Proposed Structure of Regular Regional Autonomous Government.”

The MNLF Panel, on the other hand, presented the “MNLF Position” On the Setting Up of the Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism as follows:

1. Transitional Implementing Structure:
  - i) The Transitional Implementing Structure is a Provisional Government (With attached Chart of the Structure of the Provisional Government)
  - ii) The name of the Provisional Government shall be the Provisional Bangsamoro Autonomous Government (PBAG)
  - iii) The seat of the Provisional Bangsamoro Autonomous Government shall be located in the City of Zamboanga
  - iv) The Administrative requirements of the PBAG shall be provided by the Central Government.
2. Implementing Mechanism
  - i) The Implementing Mechanism for the Implementation of the PBAG is the Tripoli Agreement of 1976
  - ii) The Executive Arm of the PBAG shall be called Executive Council.

The meeting adjourned on the third day with both parties holding on to their respective positions without reaching any consensus especially on the issue of plebiscite.

### **OIC Summit Meeting in Morocco**

Meanwhile, the MNLF Chairman and his party proceeded to Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit of Heads of States. The Summit was scheduled from 13-14 December 1994 and was preceded by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held from 10-11 December 1994.

In his speech before the Islamic Summit, the MNLF Chairman reported the partial results of the GRP-MNLF negotiations and declared that "it is imperative for this Islamic Summit to increase its moral and diplomatic pressure, in order to help convince President Ramos and his government to be more forthcoming in our future talks and at the same time prevent the Philippine Government from deviating from our correct path to peace."<sup>116</sup>

He further said, "We hope that the OIC Member States will, in the meantime, keep their plan of economic and financial collaboration with the Philippine Government and its private sectors on hold until peace is well in place in our homeland."<sup>117</sup> Ibid

As a result, the 22<sup>nd</sup> ICFM concluded that it "welcomes the readiness of the Philippine Government to enhance the confidence-building process between the Philippine Government, Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of Islamic Conference; and also welcomes its resolve to maintain the momentum generated by the goodwill for participating in a wide ranging process to seek creative solutions to the key issues so as to ensure the success of the third round of formal peace negotiations which the Conference particularly hopes to be the final one and the success of the peace process in South Philippines in general."<sup>118</sup>

Later on, the 7<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit welcomed "the agreement between the participants in the official peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), with the participation of the Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General to make the subject of the talks focusing on the necessary means to fully implement the 1976 Tripoli agreement, in letter and spirit."<sup>119</sup>

And so the year 1994 ended with the two Panels exchanging positions on certain issues identified in the Agenda and with the Muslim World expressing optimism on the outcome of the peace talks. The situation on the ground was covered by the Ceasefire Agreement, which had proven to be effective in sustaining mutual confidence for both sides.

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**Endnotes, Chapter 4**

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- <sup>1</sup> As we were writing this portion of the paper, one of the headline stories of the day (by Noralyn Mustafa, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 1, 2000) is of the interview of Commander Ghalib Andang a.k.a. Commander Robot where he denied demanding for ransom money. "We are not like the kidnapping syndicates in Manila. Our objective is to put up an independent Islamic State. We do not intend to be rich or to be praised and be famous. We just want to free ourselves from our duty and obligation, so that generations to come will not blame us in the name of Allah for failing to comply with the teachings of our religion."
- <sup>2</sup> Ramos, "*Break Not The Peace...*" p.97.
- <sup>3</sup> Ramos referred to this Press Statement, Ibid, p. 43.
- <sup>4</sup> Letter of Invitation to the OIC Secretary General signed by the MNLF Panel dated December 6, 1993. MNLF Secretariat File.
- <sup>5</sup> Timbangan is about 7 km. from the town of Jolo. It was the site of fierce fighting between MNLF and government forces at the height of the war in the 1970s. The younger brother of Chairman Misuari was killed in an encounter with the AFP in this area. This is therefore a historic site for the MNLF and the people of Sulu. The area has become the MNLF Headquarters since the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in 1986.
- <sup>6</sup> "Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the First Mixed Committee Meeting between the GRP and the MNLF with the Participation of the OIC Secretary General and the OIC Committee of Six, Jolo, Sulu, December 20, 1993." MNLF Secretariat file.
- <sup>7</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman Misuari to Saudi Arabian Ambassador in Manila dated 14 January 1994
- <sup>8</sup> Prof. Moner Bajunaid belongs to a prominent family in Maguindanao. He later on assumed the Chairmanship of the Technical Committee of the MILF Panel in their negotiations with the GRP that started in 1977. He assumed the role of Acting Chairman of the MILF Panel at the resumption of the stalled GRP-MILF Peace Talks held in Cotabato City on May 30, 2000 (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 1, 2000)
- <sup>9</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman to Indonesian Ambassador dated 3 February 1994.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman to His Majesty, Sultan Hassan Al-Bolkiah dated 2 February 1994.
- <sup>11</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman to Ambassador Yan dated March 20, 1994.
- <sup>12</sup> Sharif Zain Jali served as MNLF Spokesman and Chief Civilian Coordinator during the MNLF Peace Talks with the Aquino Government. He is an Ulama (Religious Leader) who completed his Islamic Studies at Al-Azar University, Cairo, Egypt.
- <sup>13</sup> Letter of Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman of GRP Peace Panel to Mr. Yusbar Djamil, Charges d'Affaires of the Indonesian Embassy dated 23 March 1994.
- <sup>14</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman Misuari to the Indonesian Embassy dated 26 March 1994.
- <sup>15</sup> Joint Press Statement, First Mixed Committee Meeting, April 7, 1994, Zamboanga City. MNLF Secretariat file.
- <sup>16</sup> MNLF-MILF Joint Statement issued after their meeting in Maguindanao, May 7, 1994.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter of Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman of the GRP Panel, dated May 30, 1994

addressed to the OIC Secretary General. Copy of this Memoire was sent to the MNLF Chairman through the MNLF Secretariat in a letter of Ambassador Yan dated June 15, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ed General, "Gov't. Pummels Abu Sayyaf lair," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 4, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Ed General, "35 Abu Sayyaf rebs slain in gov't. Attack," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 5, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Abu Amri Taddik, MNLF Deputy Sec. Gen. for Military Affairs, Report to MNLF Chairman Misuari, marked 'Highly Confidential' dtd 06-06-94. MNLF Secretariat file.

<sup>23</sup> Commander Raddulan Sahiron joined the MNLF in the early years of the war under the command of his elder relative Commander Usman Sali. At the height of the war, Patikul became the site of bloody battles between the MNLF and AFP forces. This is the area where AFP Brig. Gen. Bautista fell with 32 of his men. What followed was what many believed to be search-and-destroy operations launched by the military against the MNLF rebels. Commander Raddulan survived the war with many bullets wounds in his body and an amputated right arm. He was believed to have been disgruntled with the leadership of MNLF Chairman Misuari. When Abu Sayyaf leader Ustadz Aburajak Janjalani came to his area, Commander Raddulan welcomed him. Believing that the Abu Sayyaf cause was the continuation of the Muslim struggle, he decided to join and became a leading Abu Sayyaf leader in Sulu.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Tham Manjoorsa comes from a prominent family in Sulu. His father was a Public School Division Superintendent with last assignment in Mati, Davao Oriental. Dr. Manjoorsa was a practicing optometrist in Jolo when he left town to join his colleagues in organizing the MNLF in 1968-69. He is considered a senior leader of the MNLF handling National Intelligence Services. He served as Chairman of the MNLF Ceasefire Committee during the GRP-MNLF Talks that collapsed in 1977. After the signing of the 1996 Peace Agreement, Dr. Manjoorsa accepted appointment from Governor Misuari as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture in the ARMM.

<sup>25</sup> MNLF Situation Report sent by MNLF Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin to the MNLF Chairman dated August 4, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Roberto G. Burgos, "MNLF joins war vs. Abu Sayyaf," *Manila Standard*, June 8, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Ed General, "Gov't. Pummels..." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 4, 1994.

<sup>28</sup> Ed General, "35 Abu Sayyaf Rebs Slain..." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 5, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> MNLF Spot Report dated June 13, 1994 addressed to MNLF Chairman Misuari and signed by MNLF Sulu Provincial Chairman Abdurahim Aradais.

<sup>30</sup> Rolly San Juan and J. Feliciano, "Police Tighten Security in Zambo Following Bombing," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 7, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Duenas, "Hell in Patikul," *Philippine Free Press*, June 18, 1994. p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Aris Ilagan, "Basilan Band's Camp Cordoned Off," *Manila Bulletin*, June 10, 1994.

<sup>33</sup> Roy Sinfuego, "Muslim Groups Decry Killing," *Manila Bulletin*, June 10, 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred Dalizon & Ed Balingit, "Ramos rejects terror gang's ransom demand," *Philippines Times Journal*, June 11, 1994; Bobby Capco, Dave Gomez and Non Alquitran, "Ramos rejects ransom for hostages in Basilan," *The Philippine Star*, June 11, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> Noel Bartolome and Mia Gonzalez, "Ramos Rejects Emergency Bid," *Today*, June 11, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "Troops Launch New Sayyaf Assault," *The Manila Times*, June 10, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> Asmad Abdul was reported as the Intelligence Officer of the Abu Sayyaf according to Military Intelligence Report. He confessed to this writer in April 1993 that he was one of the founders of the Abu Sayyaf but he joined them in order to put the Abu Sayyaf struggle parallel to the MNLF. He was then working for Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, an Arab national representing the Manila Office of the International Islamic Relief Organization.

<sup>39</sup> Mila Vilasquez & Joy Gruta, "Sayyaf Officer Slain; Ransom Hiked to P1 M," *Malaya*, June 12, 1994

<sup>40</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 13, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> Editorial, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 14, 1994.

<sup>42</sup> Al Habsi and Malou Talosig, "Fierce Battle on a Hilltop: 26 killed in assault", *Today*, June 24, 1994

. This police report was confirmed by the MNLF Basilan Command in its Report to the MNLF Chairman dated June 24, 1994. MNLF Secretariat Files.

<sup>43</sup> MNLF Report on the Military Operations Against the Abu Sayyaf and the Sampinit Misencounter dated June 24, 1994 submitted to the MNLF Chairman by Brig. Gen. Talib Congo, Chairman, Basilan State Revolutionary Committee, translated and edited by Abraham S. Iribani, Chairman, MNLF Secretariat.

<sup>44</sup> Aris Ilagan & Cena de Guzman, "20 Hostages Freed; Band Keeps Priest," *Manila Bulletin*, June 14, 1994.

<sup>45</sup> Fel Maragay, "Ramos Wants to Speed up Talks with MNLF," *Manila Standard*, June 15, 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Bobby Capco, "Speed up Talks with MNLF, Ramos Orders," *The Philippine Star*, June 15, 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Cena De Guzman, "Troops Assault Basilan Camp," *Manila Bulletin*, June 16, 1994.

<sup>48</sup> Dave Gomez, "MNLF will not give Sanctuary to Abu Sayyaf," *The Philippine Star*, June 16, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> "Cop killed in Misencounter," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 16, 1994.

<sup>50</sup> MNLF Chairman Misuari, letter to Ambassador Pieter Damanik, Embassy of the Republic of

Indonesia, Manila, July 4, 1994.

<sup>51</sup> The Abu Sayyaf Crisis: Its Implication on the MNLF. Manila, 18 June 1994. MNLF Secretariat analysis of the Abu Sayyaf Crisis drafted by Jam Maridul, Deputy Chairman, MNLF Secretariat.

<sup>52</sup> MNLF Report on the Military Operations Against the Abu Sayyaf and the Sampinit Misenco

unter... translated and edited by Abraham S. Iribani, Chairman, MNLF Secretariat.

<sup>53</sup> Cena De Guzman, "Troops assault..." *Manila Bulletin*, June 16, 1994.

<sup>54</sup> "3 Marines Hurt in Clash; MNLF Renegades Slow Down Troops Pursuing Abu Sayyaf,"

*Malaya*, June 17, 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Dave Gomez, "Operations to Rescue Priest Start in Basilan," *The Philippine Star*, June 16, 1994.

<sup>56</sup> "Nacorda: I want to live: Stop offensive, Pleads Priest," *Malaya*, June 18, 1994.

<sup>57</sup> "Muslims Call for Peace at Prayer Rally," *Today*, June 18, 1994.

<sup>58</sup> Cynthia Balana & J. Feliciano, "Gov't. Suspends Blitz vs. Sayyaf," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 18, 1994.

<sup>59</sup> "Gov't. Launches 'final assault' vs. Sayyaf," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 22, 1994.

<sup>60</sup> MNLF Chairman, letter to Ambassador Damanik dated July 4, 1994.

<sup>61</sup> "Sayyaf Men Kill 6 Marines in Ambush, Flee Hideout," *Malaya*, June 23, 1994.

<sup>62</sup> Samson Gogo, "Muslim Christian Leaders Call for Religious Solidarity," *The Manila Chronicle*, June 24, 1994.

<sup>63</sup> "Stop War, Nur Urges Gov't, Rebs in Basilan," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 24, 1994.

<sup>64</sup> Ali G. Macabalang, "Islam Faithful Asked to Help in Fight against Abu Sayyaf," *Manila Bulletin*, June 24, 1994.

<sup>65</sup> Eric Garafil, "Ermita: Let's not Drag MNLF to War," *The Manila Chronicle*, June 27, 1994.

<sup>66</sup> Fel V. Maragay, "Ramos Downplays Reports on MNLF Link with Sayyaf," *Manila Standard*, June 29, 1994.

<sup>67</sup> Cmdr. Khaid Ajibun, State Chairman, MNLF Sulu. Report to the MNLF Chairman Dtd July 3, 1994.

<sup>68</sup> Letter of MNLF Chairman to Ambassador Damanik dated July 4, 1994 sent by facsimile from

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia through the MNLF Secretariat Office in Manila.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Report of Abu Amri Taddik, Deputy Secretary General, MNLF for Military Affairs. He showed to the MNLF Secretariat copy of the written report on the meeting held at the Sulu Provincial Capitol on July 2, 1994. In attendance were USEC F. Gacis of Department of National Defense, Governor Tupay Loong, Col. Ponciano Millena, CO, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Brigade, Brig. Gen. Chavez, Deputy SOUTHCOM Commander, Capt. Gambao, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Brigade, Vice Governor Hadji Munib Estino. The same idea of expanded ARMM was also presented by Governor Loong to this writer in their meeting at Sulo Hotel sometime in August of 1995 which he requested to be delivered to the MNLF Leadership. And indeed, Chairman Misuari run unopposed in the ARMM election of September 1996 with the full support of the Ramos Administration.

<sup>71</sup> Cynthia Balana, "Pakistanis Eyed as Sayyaf Allies," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 5, 1994.

<sup>72</sup> "Pakistan, Iran Envoys Hit Report," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 6, 1994.

<sup>73</sup> Joe Macaspac, "Ramos Orders Probe on Sayyaf's Foreign Backers," *Manila Standard*, July 8, 1994.

- <sup>74</sup> Romie Evangelista, "Military to Protest Truce Violation by MNLF", *Manila Standard*, July 8, 1994 and Malou Talosig, "Govt, MNLF swap lists of ceasefire violations," *Today*, July 9, 1994.
- <sup>75</sup> Lt. Col. Delos Santos graduated as member of NDCP RC 31 (1996-1997).
- <sup>76</sup> The Two letters were signed by Col. Delos Santos and S/Supt Aukasa Handa, PNPC, Sulu addressed to the MNLF Provincial Ceasefire Committee both dated July 28, 1994. The first one was received by the MNLF in the morning and the second one was received in the afternoon showing the urgency of the requests.
- <sup>77</sup> Col. Millena graduated as member of NDCP RC 27 (1992-1993).
- <sup>78</sup> Malou Talosig, "Assault vs Sayyaf On: By land, Sea and Air," *Today*, July 31, 1994 .
- <sup>79</sup> MNLF Situation Report sent by Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin to MNLF Chairman Misuari dated 4 ugust 1994. MNLF Secretariat Files.
- <sup>80</sup> Commander Robot recovered from his serious wounds. How he did that remains a mystery. He and his men were believed to have been involved in a series of kidnapping incidents in Sulu afterwards, the latest and most sensational of which is the recent kidnapping of 19 foreigners and 2 Filipinos in a Malaysian Island Resort of Sipadan Island off the coast of Sabah, Malaysia. As of this writing, negotiations are still ongoing for the release of these hostages who are now in the hands of Commander Robot and his men in the jungles of Talipao, Sulu.
- <sup>81</sup> MNLF Situation Report sent by Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin... pp. 3-4.
- <sup>82</sup> "I thought I would die: Kidnapped Priest Recounts Ordeal." *Manila Standard*, August 2, 1994.
- <sup>83</sup> Fel Maragay and Joem Macaspac, "Nacorda Release Paves Way for Resumption of Peace Talks," *Manila Standard*, August 10, 1994.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid
- <sup>86</sup> Report of the Chairman of the Third GRP-MNLF Mixed Committee Meeting Submitted to the Second Round of the GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, Jakarta, August 31, 1994. pp. 12-13.
- <sup>87</sup> Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the Mixed Committee Between the GRP and the MNLF with the Participation of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General, Jakarta, 31 August, 1994. Para 50-55.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid, Para 65.
- <sup>90</sup> Report of the Chairman of the Third GRP-MNLF Mixed Committee Meeting ... p. 13.
- <sup>91</sup> Ambassador S. Wiryono, Chairman of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round of Formal Talks in his Opening Remarks at the start of the formal session, Jakarta, September 1, 1994.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid
- <sup>93</sup> Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the Second Formal Talks between the GRP and the MNLF with the participation of the OIC Secretary General and the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six, Jakarta, 1-5 September, 1994.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid, Para 59 to 79.



<sup>96</sup> Ibid, Para 138, 140.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, Para 146.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, Para 147.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, Para 241.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid Para 251 and 253.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, Para 255.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid Para 302.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid Para 303-304.

<sup>105</sup> MNLF Chairman Misuari, "Letter to President Ramos," dated September 7, 1994. I personally delivered the letter to Congressman Ermita in Manila on September 20, 1994.

<sup>106</sup> Joint Press Communiqué of the Second Round of GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, Jakarta, Indonesia, September 5, 1994.

<sup>107</sup> Jesus Bigornia, "Indon officers' presence stirs many doubts," Manila Bulletin, September 19, 1994.

<sup>108</sup> Senator Rodolfo Biazon, Opening Remarks at the Joint Public Hearing conducted at the Senate by the Committees on Peace, Unification and Reconciliation and National Defense and Security on

September 14, 1994.

<sup>109</sup> Minutes of the Senate Joint Public Hearing, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> Senator Orlando Mercado, "Less Ado About Indon Ceasefire Observers," Official Statement issued to the Press on September 8, 1994.

<sup>111</sup> *The Philippine Star*, September 15, 1994, "Drilon: Presence of Indon Observers in RP is legal."

<sup>112</sup> *Manila Standard*, September 24, 1994, "Biazon: Indon Team May Come."

<sup>113</sup> *Today*, September 24, 1994, "3 Indonesian Ceasefire monitors arriving today."

<sup>114</sup> *Daily Zamboanga Times*, November 28, 1994.

<sup>115</sup> Secretary Alexander P. Aguirre, Chairman, GRP Ad Hoc Working Group, "Opening Statements

– GRP-MNLF Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting, November 27-29, 1994, Zamboanga City.

<sup>116</sup> Nur Misuari, MNLF Chairman, speech delivered at the 7<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit held in Casablanca,

Kingdom of Morocco, 13-14 December 1994.

<sup>118</sup> Res. 22-P of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ICFM, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, December 1994.

<sup>119</sup> Final Communiqué of the Seventh Islamic Summit Conference, Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, 13-15 December 1994.





## 1995: Race Against Time



MNLF Delegation to the Peace Talks in Jakarta, Indonesia. First Round  
MNLF-GRP Formal Peace Talks at Hotel Indonesia, Jakarta, October 29,  
1993.

*By Time, surely man is in loss. Except those who believe and do good, and exhort one another to Truth, And exhort one another to patience.*

—Qur'an: 103

The year started on a positive note, at least from the GRP side. Ambassador Yan, in a Press Statement issued on January 2, expressed his “deep confidence that the peace process [would] continue to reap positive results in various fronts.”<sup>1</sup> He issued the statement “to allay the alleged concerns expressed by MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari in published reports, over his personal security in the course of the projected meetings of the Mixed Committee in Southern Philippines...”<sup>2</sup>

*January 1.* I visited Senator Rasul at her residence for a meeting as part of the MNLF policy of transparency and information campaign first and foremost with the Muslim political leaders. With us at that meeting were Office of Muslim Affairs Executive Director Dimas Pundato, Maguindanao Congressman Simeon Datumanong, ARMM Vice-Governor Nabil Tan, former Sulu Congressman Sakur Tan, Atty. Salialam and Ambassador Mukhtar Muallam. I briefed them on the progress of the negotiations, and they gave some suggestions for consideration by the MNLF leadership.

The situation in the ground, however, particularly in Basilan and Sulu was not conducive to confidence building. There were AFP troop movements in the area, which the MNLF was suspicious about since such movements were not coordinated with the Joint Ceasefire Committee in accordance with JCC Guidelines and Ground Rules. The situation was aggravated by the killing of an MNLF local leader in Maluso, Basilan on January 9 by suspected members of the local militia.

*January 10.* The MNLF Secretariat relayed to Chairman Misuari in Jeddah the proposal of Ambassador Damanik to hold another Mixed Committee Meeting “instead of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on 28-30 January in Davao City to be preceded by Support Committee meetings as earlier suggested.” The reason to elevate the meeting, the Ambassador said in his letter, was “that the subject is political in nature and, therefore, only the Negotiating Panel will be

able to decide on matters of crucial importance.”<sup>3</sup>

*January 12.* Chairman Misuari called up and gave his approval to the Mixed Committee Meeting in Davao as suggested by Ambassador Damanik.

*January 17.* We received another letter from the Indonesian Embassy containing the confirmation of the GRP Panel on the said proposal and were asking for MNLF response. However, just after this response was delivered, another letter came also from the Indonesian Embassy informing the MNLF Panel of the GRP Panel’s “difficulty in holding the meeting in Davao City because of [accommodation problem[s]...”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the GRP Panel suggested Zamboanga City as the venue instead of Davao City. The MNLF had earlier submitted sixty-two names as members of its delegation, the GRP Panel had forty, and the OIC headed by Indonesia had twenty members.

The MNLF Secretariat had to respond to this new venue according to instructions from Chairman Misuari. The OIC was also prepared since no less than Indonesian Minister Alatas, Chairman of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six, who specifically mentioned Davao City as the venue of the Mixed Committee Meeting. Though the MNLF believed “that transferring the venue to Zamboanga City...might at this point...be impractical considering that the MNLF Chairman was recently the subject of vicious and sensational issues raised by certain local leaders in Zamboanga City...”<sup>5</sup> the GRP Panel maintained their stand that the meeting be held in Zamboanga City.

Rep. Ermita called me up and gave the rationale for the change of venue. Though the issue appeared to be simple – a suggestion to change the venue – to the MNLF, however, it was a matter for serious thought. The Muslim World was aware of this proposed Davao Meeting, as the MNLF Chairman had made announcements before he left Saudi Arabia. Besides, the MNLF and its supporters were all set for the meeting and the security arrangements were being finalized. Beyond the simple matter of venue, the important element in the issue was the matter of honoring previous commitments made. If the other party could not honor one small commitment, how could they be expected to make good their commitments on more substantial issues? The MNLF has always been haunted by their sad experience in the past with the Marcos and Aquino Administrations,

both which made commitments, verbally and in writing that never materialized. The matter of honoring commitments at this point in time, no matter how small, was very important to the MNLF.

The Indonesian Embassy was placed in a very difficult situation. They could only appeal to both parties “to compromise...so as not to hamper the peace process.”<sup>6</sup>

*January 19.* I visited Ambassador Yan in his office. Among other things, I took up with him the case of Ustadz Abdulbaki Abubakar, MNLF Secretary General for Foreign Relations, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, who was expected to arrive in Manila. The papers reported him to be the moving force behind the Abu Sayyaf. I cleared this with Ambassador Yan, telling him that the report was not true as Ustadz Abubakar was always with the MNLF Chairman, and that this kind of information was being disseminated to divide and weaken the MNLF leadership. Ambassador Yan promised to take up the issue with the AFP and PNP since he knew the MNLF official personally.

Ustadz Abubakar arrived in Manila safely, and we met him at the airport in the company of officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs. His case was soon cleared with government authorities. In fact, the case as reported had no basis.

*January 23.* At past midnight, after a series of overseas calls arranged by the MNLF Secretariat between the MNLF Chairman, Ambassador Damanik and Rep. Ermita, the MNLF Chairman finally agreed with the suggestions to seek the advice of President Ramos. In the afternoon, word was relayed by Ambassador Damanik through our office that no less than President Ramos had requested the Zamboanga City venue and had committed to hold the next meeting in Davao City.

#### Fourth Mixed Committee Meeting

*Zamboanga City.* The 4<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting was finally convened in Zamboanga City for the second time (the first time being in April 1994) on January 29-31. Ambassador Yan headed the GRP Panel while the MNLF Chairman Misuari, who arrived in Zamboanga City by speedboat from Jolo, headed the MNLF Panel. Ambassador Mohsin represented the OIC Secretary General and Dr. Hassan

Wirajuda, who served as Chairman of the meeting, headed the Indonesian Delegation with twenty members. Ambassador Rajab of the Libyan Embassy was also present as usual.

As scheduled, the gathering was preceded by Support Committee meetings except for Support Committee #5, which had earlier decided to elevate the issues previously discussed to the Mixed Committee. After intensive deliberations of the issues submitted, the Mixed Committee confirmed and endorsed for the next Formal Talks 24 points on education and 7 points on economic/financial systems, mines and minerals.

The Committee also noted the progress of the works of Support Committee #1 (National Defense and Regional Security Forces), particularly on matters relating to the joining of the MNLF forces with the AFP with clarifications submitted by the GRP Panel.

No additional consensus was reached by Support Committee #4 (Administrative). Support Committee #5 (Shariah) was given instructions to continue further discussions of their agenda.

The Mixed Committee made intensive deliberations about the results of the November 1994 meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group for the Setting up of Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism, and even conducted consultative meetings among the leaders. The GRP and the MNLF Panels explained and clarified their respective positions with candor and openness. No consensus was reached, but the Working Group was instructed by the Mixed Committee to make further consultations particularly regarding matters related to the mechanics on the establishment, duration, structure and functions of the Provisional Government.

The Mixed Committee instructed the various Support Committees and the Ad Hoc Working Group to redouble their efforts with the goal of presenting their recommendations for further consideration in the next Mixed Committee Meeting scheduled in May 1995 in Davao City.

Before the meeting officially ended, Chairman Misuari had a very important visitor in the morning: SOUTHCOM Commander Lt. Gen. Orlando Soriano. A one-on-one meeting between the two leaders was held in the lobby of the hotel, after which the MNLF Chairman then returned to Jolo and left for Saudi Arabia in mid February to attend to his international commitments.



*Alleged Ceasefire Violations.* While the Negotiating Panels were talking peace across the table, AFP troops movements continued since January up to March. In a letter sent by MNLF Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chairman of the MNLF-JCC to his counterpart in the GRP-JCC, Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, he called the attention of the GRP Panel to what he referred to as “ceasefire violations” committed by GRP Forces in Basilan. The information he shared was as follows:

- January 29, 1995. Philippine Army elements encroached into Sitio Lingasong, Municipality of Tuburan, classified as an MNLF-identified area, coordinating neither with local MNLF commanders nor with the local ceasefire committee. As a result, a firefight erupted around 9 a.m. that day and lasted for about three hours.
- January 30, 1995. About eleven a.m., Philippine Army elements and PNP/SAF entered Lebbak, and MNLF-identified area in Cabacaban, Municipality of Sumisip, Basilan. There was also no coordination and, as a result, a firefight ensued between the two forces.
- January 31, 1995. Around three p.m., elements of Army Scout rangers and PNP/SAF, also without coordination with local MNLF commanders, intruded into the jungle/camp base of Brig. Gen. Talib Congo, MNLF Chairman for the province of Basilan. The MNLF forces guarding the area identified themselves, but they were ignored and instead subjected to heavy fire. The area was overrun and looted. One MNLF member was martyred and another wounded.<sup>7</sup>

These alleged “violations” were committed while the Mixed Committee was being held in Zamboanga City, and the third attack (January 31) even took place right after the meeting of the MNLF Chairman with the SOUTHCOM Commander, General Orlando Soriano. This incident, according to the MNLF, has undermined the credibility of SOUTHCOM particularly Gen. Soriano, for “while he is constructively endeavoring to contribute to the realization of peace...AFP troops in Basilan were challenging such encouraging efforts by making big provocations...”<sup>8</sup>

*Jolo, Sulu.* Meanwhile, it was reported by the MNLF Provincial Ceasefire Committee that Edwin Angeles, a known Abu Sayyaf leader, had surrendered with eight of his men to military authorities in the area of Tagbak in the outskirts of Jolo.<sup>9</sup> This was not reported in the papers, and the military did not announce the event to the media despite the fact that Angeles was supposed to be a big catch for the authorities; only a few days before, he had been noted as being among

the top ten in the Most Wanted Persons in the country with a reward of P250,000 as published by the Police authorities in the national papers.

*Basilan.* The MNLF State Chairman, Talib Congo, reported alleged AFP ceasefire violations, specifically that the 18<sup>th</sup> IB, Philippine Army had intruded into MNLF areas and put up military detachments without coordination with the MNLF.<sup>10</sup> The MNLF could only conclude that these were not just random, isolated violations committed by ill-briefed and disoriented elements within the AFP contingents stationed in that province but ceasefire violations committed in a systematic way.<sup>11</sup>

All these reports of alleged violations were referred to the JCC. As a result, the GRP-MNLF JCC, with the participation of the OIC Ceasefire Observer Team, conducted a series of investigations in the areas where the alleged violations took place.

Meanwhile, Support Committee meetings continued. In Davao City, Support Committees #2, #3 and #4 held their sessions; Support Committees #1 and #5 did not feel the need to hold another meeting during that period as SC#5 (Shariah) had earlier decided to elevate the issues previously discussed to the level of the Mixed Committee.

Support Committee #2 came up with eight points of consensus while SC# 3 and #4 did not produce any substantial points. Even with these results, the MNLF Panel through the Secretary General Muslimin Sema, issued a positive statement to the media reiterating the MNLF commitment to the pursuit of peaceful solution to the Mindanao conflict.

In mid-March, the MNLF Secretariat transmitted to the MNLF Chairman the letter of Libyan Ambassador Rajab regarding the decision of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to welcome the initiative “for all parties to the talks to pay a courtesy visit to Libya as a tribute for the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 and to convey the participants’ deep appreciation for the support and the encouragement extended by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in finding [an] honorable, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict in Southern Philippines.”<sup>12</sup> The decision to visit Tripoli was reached by the parties to the talks during the First Round of Formal Talks held in Jakarta October 25-November 7, 1993 and renewed in the 4<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting held in Zamboanga City on January

29-31, 1995.

*Tension in Sulu.* As the situation in Basilan started to normalize due to the investigation of alleged ceasefire violations by the JCC and the implementation of confidence-building measures, tension began to rise in Sulu. The Philippine Marines based in Jolo were informed by intelligence sources of the presence of the Abu Sayyaf elements in the vicinity of Maimbung Municipality. In their letter to the MNLF dated **March 3**, the Marines made known their intention to launch military pursuit operations against the Abu Sayyaf which would involve a passage of the Marines through Timbangan (MNLF General Headquarters); MNLF forces in the vicinity were instructed to move away by about 800 meters from target area. The Marines also identified certain areas as safe havens for civilians and targeted certain areas for artillery, naval and aerial bombing.

Immediately, the MNLF Secretariat dispatched an urgent message by wire from Jolo to GRP Panel Chairman Ambassador Yan informing him of these operations and that the MNLF would allow GRP forces to pass through Timbangan only with the presence of OIC Ceasefire Observer Team around. We requested that Ambassador Yan advise the AFP to keep the operations in abeyance pending arrival of the OIC Ceasefire Observers to avoid any untoward incident from happening.<sup>13</sup> The same message was also sent to the Indonesian Embassy in Manila.

In a formal letter dated March 9, 1995, addressed to the Indonesian Ambassador, we reiterated our message about this situation so that the Joint Ceasefire Committee and the OIC Observer Team could prevent possible accidents that could arise from this operation. After consultations with concerned leaders in Sulu and with the advice from the OIC Ceasefire Observers, the MNLF with much hesitation, agreed to allow the Marines to pass through in accordance with the terms of the Joint Guidelines and Ground Rules and the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on the Role of the OIC Ceasefire Observers. A condition was specified however, that the OIC Observer Team be present in Timbangan at the time of the passage of GRP forces to deter any possible sabotage from any third party; the MNLF did not want the alleged ceasefire violations in Basilan to be committed in Sulu as well.

With these terms agreed upon by the parties, the GRP forces

finally implemented their plan. The Marines and PNP elements passed through the MNLF Headquarters in the presence of MNLF officials and the representative of the OIC Ceasefire Observer Teams headed by Brig. Gen. Asmardi Arbi.

Towards the end of March however, the situation in the ground began to show some improvement based on my telephone conversation with Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chairman of the MNLF Panel in the Joint Ceasefire Committee.<sup>14</sup> He said that the situation was relatively under control and some Marine forces had been withdrawn from the area except small units under the command of a Muslim Marine officer<sup>15</sup>; these were engaged in civic operations such as the repair of houses and mosques destroyed or damaged during operations earlier conducted against Abu Sayyaf group.

The MNLF forces in the nearby camp about 200 meters away could only watch with curiosity, and wonder what this war against the Abu Sayyaf was about. The Abu Sayyaf, meanwhile, was reported to have eluded these massive military operations in Sulu.

### **The Raid on Ipil**

*April 4.* Suddenly, a report came of a bloody raid in Ipil, the capital town of Zamboanga Sibugay Province. The Joint Ceasefire Committee (JCC) meeting was in progress in a Makati Hotel when we received the news of this. An MNLF official reported to us by telephone from Zamboanga City at about four in the afternoon that armed elements had entered the town of Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur and that fighting was still going on. The news was soon aired over the radio and television. As the JCC proceeded with their meeting in the evening, Gen. Ruiz, Chairman of the GRP-JCC handed to us a letter which said, "on 041230H April 1995, an estimated fifty (50) fully armed men led by alleged MNLF leader Atip Nieto and Muslim Extremists leader Anwar (TNU) raided/attacked Poblacion Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur. Said armed groups barged into banks, namely Allied, RCBC, PCIB, PNB, DBP and burned Emilio's Bakeshop and RBSM Building...[There are] alarming civilian casualties and destruction of properties committed by the attackers...[We] request immediate action on this matter which, if true, constitutes a serious violation of the Ceasefire Agreement."<sup>16</sup>

Initial reports we received in the evening indicated that there was no MNLF involvement. The MNLF Secretariat called up Chairman Misuari in Jeddah to brief him about this incident. In a live interview aired on a Manila TV Station, the MNLF Chairman condemned the perpetrators of the raid. The Secretariat, upon instructions from the MNLF Chairman, prepared the following official MNLF statement that was released to the members of the Press the following day, April 5:<sup>17</sup>

April 5, 1995

#### OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

#### MNLF DEPLORES IPIL INCIDENT

The bloody incident that took place yesterday, April 4, 1995 in Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur is a very unfortunate event in the current course and call for peace which all peace loving peoples, organizations and governments must condemn.

The MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT, now engaged in Peace Talks with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) with the active participation of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) deplores in the strongest possible terms the acts of violence and atrocities committed by the perpetrators. These are handiworks of saboteurs who insist on violence as the only course for change.

We join our partners in peace, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines under the leadership of His Excellency, President Fidel V. Ramos, and the peace loving humanity in condemning the perpetrators of these acts of violence even as we continuously and persistently call on our people to stand behind us in our search for a just, lasting and genuine peace. We should remain vigilant in protecting our civilians and their properties and the gains of peace that we have so far achieved in the current Peace Talks.

The MNLF Leadership and our people is committed as ever to do just that – GIVE PEACE A MAXIMUM CHANCE – until peace and progress reign amongst our people in the Bangsamoro Homeland and the country as a whole.

BY AUTHORITY OF THE MNLF PANEL

(Sgd) ABRAHAM (Abet) IRIBANI  
Chairman, MNLF Secretariat For the Peace Process

NOTED BY:

(Sgd) MAJ. GEN. ABDUL SAHRIN  
Chairman, MNLF-JCC

Despite the repeated MNLF denials made formally during JCC meetings and in the media, the AFP continued to issue statements to the media accusing the MNLF of involvement in the Ipil raid. Then Justice Undersecretary Demetrio Demetria was quoted in the papers to have said, “We need a reappraisal of the talks because of the involvement of the MNLF in the Ipil Raid.”<sup>18</sup>

The MNLF Secretariat immediately wrote Ambassador Yan, Chairman of the GRP Panel, on behalf of the MNLF Chairman “to verify the veracity and the real value of such statements so that the MNLF Leadership and the MNLF Chairman in particular [would] be correctly informed and be guided accordingly.”<sup>19</sup> Ambassador Yan replied, saying, “Secretary Demetria used to be Chairman of a support committee...his views do not reflect the position of the GRP... The President gives assurance that the peace process shall continue to its most favorable conclusion to the satisfaction of all concern. We hope, too, that we can accelerate the process despite the incidents that seem to obstruct and derail it.”<sup>20</sup>

In the JCC Meeting held in Zamboanga City on April 25, Gen. Ruiz of the GRP-JCC handed over to the MNLF copy of the list of “PERSONALITIES INVOLVED IN THE IPIL ATTACK”. The list contained six names of Abu Sayyaf members, five names from the MNLF’s Zamboanga del Sur Committee, fourteen names listed as MNLF and two names listed as MNLF Lost Command.

The MNLF continued its own investigation and on May 10, I personally handed over to Ambassador Yan copy of the MNLF Initial Report on the results of its investigation of the Ipil Raid.<sup>21</sup>

Those listed as Abu Sayyaf members were confirmed by the MNLF Report as truly Abu Sayyaf members. Whether or not they participated in the Ipil raid however, should be subject to further investigation.

Those listed as belonging to MNLF’s Zamboanga del Sur Committee were not already considered MNLF members but were relatives and followers of Melham Alam, former MNLF Chief of Staff, who was reported to have been dismissed by the MNLF Chairman

in 1989. One of them was a sixty-year-old man who was sick and bed-ridden at the time of the raid.

Of the fourteen names listed as MNLF members, four were prominent Commanders of the MNLF. One name was that of a former MNLF Inspector General, who had resigned his post in 1989 and had gone with his family to Johore Baru, West Malaysia where he was already gainfully employed according to the MNLF report.

Another name was Alvarez Isnaji<sup>22</sup>. He was a member of the MNLF Panel and was always with the entourage of the MNLF Chairman. He was in Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia when the raid took place.

Another prominent name was Jamil Lukman. There was no one in the MNLF using this name except for him. He belonged to the prominent LUKMAN Clan in Lanao del Sur (headed by the late Congressman Rashid Lukman). He surrendered to the Government in 1975 and was an elected Member of the ARMM Regional Assembly. MNLF officials asked him about a possible involvement, and he vehemently denied this. How could he have participated in that barbaric raid in Ipil considering his stature in the Maranao society and his position in the ARMM?

The MNLF believed that the inclusion of the names of some prominent MNLF Commanders as participants in the Ipil raid when they could not have been there by any stretch of imagination rendered the list submitted by the Military as incredible and could just have been made to suit some hidden agenda. These people, whose combat records in the MNLF had become part of contemporary Moro history, were listed as mere participants in the raid that burned a peaceful town and massacred civilians. Jamil Lukman would not have left his comfortable position in the ARMM and risked the reputation of the Lukman Clan of Lanao only to participate in a raid that was obviously designed to rob banks and sow terror in a peaceful and prosperous town like Ipil.

To the MNLF, after having made an initial investigation, the more important issue was not the list of the suspected raiders but the raid itself. How could it happen? How could the military intelligence fail to detect the raid despite earlier reports of armed groups planning to sow terror in selected areas in Mindanao? How could the raid be so precise that the AFP and PNP personnel in the area were caught by surprise? What had happened to the military checkpoints along

the national highway and selected strategic roads in Ipil?

Before the Ipil raid took place, the AFP announced that the Abu Sayyaf Group was on the run. The Philippine Marines were indeed running after them in Sulu from March 15 to 31 as related earlier. Edwin Angeles, a self-confessed top Abu Sayyaf leader, surrendered to the Government in February 1995 and shortly thereafter warned them of the Ipil raid. "The information described in detail how the raid would be carried out, how many men would be involved, and placed the date of the attack in the first week of April. The government did not listen."<sup>23</sup> The surrender of Angeles was followed by the arrest of several Abu Sayyaf members in Sulu, two of whom were top leaders, namely: Khaddafy Janjalani<sup>24</sup> and Jovenal Bruno. The two were placed in the PNP stockade in Camp Crame but were able to escape few months after.

*"Situational Report on the Ipil Incident."* The MNLF Secretariat received this report (typewritten and dated April 23, 1995) from an unnamed MNLF source in the ground and sent the same to the MNLF Chairman by facsimile on April 29. The report said:

On the night of April 3, 1995, Ustadz Abdurajak was talking to somebody [on] his mobile radio. After a few minutes, he instructed us to prepare, because we were moving along the coastal areas. We were 35 persons armed with M14 and M16 with two radio sets. We arrived early morning, there waiting two (2) Speed boats with 2 units of outboard engines 200Hp each. Then we boarded and [ran] toward the direction of Zamboanga del Sur. While on the boat, Ustadz Abdurajak told us "*Bunu-un natu in satru yadtu ha Ipil*" (Tausug dialect for "We will kill the enemies in Ipil").

Before we arrived at Port Palid, we saw a Fusu coming from the direction of coastal area of Surabaya following us to Ipil. We arrived together with the Fusu at Port Palid, [and] then we proceeded to the town (Ipil). On the way, we were kept in the middle of men heavily equipped with arms complete with uniform without patches and plate names, with military radio communications carried at their back."

During the firing towards the directions of the residential area and commercial buildings of the town we saw civilians bringing [a] number of sacks which we did not know what was inside. Then, we withdrew to Port Palid where the two Speedboats were waiting. We [ran] going [in] the direction of Basilan and arrived at noontime and the Fusu we did not know where [they went]. We only knew what was inside the sacks, money, when we arrived in Basilan."<sup>25</sup>



*Meeting with Ambassador Yan.* During that May 10 meeting with Ambassador Yan, which the MNLF Secretariat reported to the Chairman Misuari,<sup>26</sup> we intimated to him the re-training program of the MNLF according to instructions from the MNLF leadership. The GRP Panel officials appreciated this gesture of confidence but said people might use this to criticize the Administration of President Ramos for allowing the MNLF to go on training and that this might create unnecessary tension in the area. I argued that this was precisely the reason why the MNLF Leadership was informing the GRP Panel about this, so that precautions could be made and potential problems could be avoided. Amb. Yan and Congressman Ermita said that they could not make any commitments, but that they would inform the President about this. At the moment, they said, even if the GRP Panel through the recommendation of the GRP-JCC were to allow this re-training of thousands of MNLF forces, it would still remain purely an in-house requirement of the MNLF; the GRP Panel could not make any commitments yet. They added that the President was satisfied with the progress of the talks and was looking forward to meeting with the MNLF Chairman.

At this meeting, we also handed to Ambassador Yan a brief report regarding the status of the Islamic Bank (formerly Philippine Amanah Bank). Congressman Ermita suggested that the GRP Panel do something about this saying, "I discussed this with Brother Nur and this Bank could serve as conduit for the entry of Foreign Muslim investors and this could help build confidence in the Peace Talks." The GRP Panel committed to see the Secretary of Finance about this so that recommendations could be made for consideration by the President.

In the afternoon of the same day, Ambassador Yan again invited me to his office. There, he reiterated to me the satisfaction of President Ramos on the progress of the Peace Talks. He said the President was willing to meet with the MNLF Chairman as we approached the core of the talks. He intimated to me that as he looked at the positive progress in the Support Committee levels, there were two core issues that the GRP Panel were not clear about: the issues of Territorial Coverage and Provisional Government. President Ramos was satisfied with the principles and understanding reached on the issue of Defense as discussed in the last Mixed Committee

meeting in Zamboanga City.

Ambassador Yan said that, as he and Congressman Ermita were preparing their positions on these two core issues, they wanted the MNLF Chairman to similarly share with them his views so that these issues could be tabled in an Executive Meeting during the period of the Mixed Committee meeting in Davao in the coming June and before the Formal Talks in Jakarta so that some kind of a breakthrough could be reached.

As I listened to Ambassador Yan's views, I could feel some hesitancy on his part to proceed to the Jakarta Meeting without any mutual understanding with the MNLF Chairman. He added that if we could not reach some understanding on this, the talks were likely to drag and the "field" would be vulnerable to saboteurs from all sides including from the ranks of hardcore MNLF leaders who did not seem to support the MNLF Chairman in the talks.

He reiterated what he and Congressman Ermita had intimated to me during our morning meeting. They wanted the MNLF Chairman to appear before the Filipino public not as a rebel but as a strong Muslim leader capable of helping the Administration of President Ramos in the economic recovery program and in realizing peace and stability in the country. They could arrange, he said, a forum where the MNLF Chairman could talk to business and political leaders not only in Mindanao but also in Manila. This was the way they viewed the MNLF Chairman, and they wanted the Filipino people to share this view with the GRP Panel. They viewed the MNLF, Ambassador Yan said, as a rebel organization that had matured into a group of leaders who could become real partners for economic progress and peace with the Government, in particular the Ramos Administration.

All of these I reported to the MNLF Chairman for his evaluation.<sup>27</sup> In our telephone conversation,<sup>28</sup> the Chairman Misuari instructed me to relay to the GRP Panel his readiness to proceed to the Davao Meeting in order to move positively forward with the talks and his desire and that of the MNLF leaders to reciprocate the gesture of the sincerity and good faith as shown by President Ramos and the GRP Panel under the stewardship of Ambassador Yan in the course of the entire negotiations. He cautioned me, though, that the core issues could not be taken up in a Mixed Committee Meeting — only in the Formal Talks in Jakarta. The MILF and the Abu Sayyaf would

not support the peace talks if they offered any less than the Tripoli Agreement. This I relayed to Ambassador Yan in my letter dated May 24, 1995.

### Military Operations in Pilas Island, Basilan.

As we were trying to improve the relationship of the MNLF and GRP Panels on the highest levels, the situation in the ground did not seem to follow. No less than the Chief of Staff of the MNLF Bangsamoro Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. Yusop Jikiri, issued a statement to the press on May 27, 1995 regarding military operations conducted in Pilas Island which he considered “deplorable and showing disrespect to the 1993 Interim Ceasefire Agreement. He then recommended the review of the Ceasefire Agreement and the suspension of the Support Committee meetings”<sup>29</sup>

Pilas Island is a traditional stronghold of the MNLF and the MNLF forces in the area are led by Deputy Chief of Staff, Brig. Gen. Bashir Jaylani. The AFP used land, sea and air assaults on the island. Bombs were dropped by PAF planes in Barrio Kahinaan, inflicting casualties among civilians. AFP ground troops landed in the area, and the civilians were cordoned in a mosque in Barrio Lubukan. According to MNLF report, twenty-eight civilians and MNLF sympathizers were arrested by the military as they were suspected by SOUTHCOM officials to be members of the Abu Sayyaf.<sup>30</sup>

The MNLF-JCC informed AFP officials in SOUTHCOM about this and requested that Joint Ceasefire Teams be sent to the area to defuse the tension, but SOUTHCOM officials ignored the MNLF request.<sup>31</sup>

I sent an urgent message to Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman of GRP-JCC “requesting to verify this report and to [take] appropriate steps in order to defuse the tension in the area.”<sup>32</sup> I also sent formal letters to the Libyan Embassy and the Indonesia Embassy expressing the desire of the MNLF to see positive steps taken by the GRP Panel regarding the situation.<sup>33</sup>

After I talked to the MNLF Chairman over the phone on the evening of May 25, I sent a formal letter to Ambassador Yan informing him of the instructions of the MNLF Chairman to the MNLF forces to handle the situation very carefully and of his message of confidence

that with the guidance of the GRP Panel, the tension in Pilas Island could be defused so that the Support Committees and the JCC could proceed with their meetings without any disturbance and without any delay.<sup>34</sup>

**May 31.** The MNLF leadership did not allow the Pilas incident to pass without raising it to the attention of higher GRP authorities. I, along with Senior MNLF official, MNLF Secretary General Muslimin Sema and MNLF Intelligence Chief Dr. Tham Manjoorsa, and Gen. Ruiz of the GRP-JCC, met with Ambassador Yan in his office to discuss the Pilas incident and to come up with confidence-building measures. Ambassador Yan promised to clear the matter with the AFP High Command.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, we proceed to the Indonesian Embassy for a meeting with Ambassador Damanik on the same subject. The Ambassador committed to bring the matter to the GRP Panel.

**June 3.** The US Government began to show interest in the Bangsamoro issue. At their initiative, we met with top US Embassy officials, Mr. Naim Ahmad and Mr. Hunk Henrikson. The MNLF group, composed of me, Muslimin Sema, Gen. Taddik and Rev. Cerveza, briefed the US Embassy officials on the progress of the negotiations.

### **Military Operations in Tuburan, Basilan**

As tension in Pilas Island subsided, another alleged ceasefire violation was reported by the MNLF-JCC. Reportedly, on June 6, seven government troopers were killed while eight others were wounded in a clash with suspected members of a lost command of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Tuburan, Basilan.<sup>35</sup>

The report I received from the MNLF-JCC<sup>36</sup> said that the military were from the 4<sup>th</sup> IB and 72<sup>nd</sup> IB of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the Philippine Army and that they had assaulted an area near MNLF Camp Abu Shaheed in Tuburan, Basilan under the jurisdiction of the MNLF Mobile Army headed by Commander Jan Jakilan. The assault began in the morning of June 6, and gun battles continued to rage. The MNLF suffered four wounded while the AFP assaulting force suffered eleven dead and fourteen wounded. The area of the firefight was officially an MNLF-identified area included in the list submitted by

the MNLF to the JCC. In fact, the area had been visited earlier by OIC Ceasefire Observers with GRP-JCC officials when they were still organizing the Basilan JCC and coming up with standard operating procedures.

According to a SOUTHCOM announcement, the military assault was launched against suspected Abu Sayyaf elements in the area. However, this area was under the command of MNLF Commander Jan Jakilan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mobile Army of the MNLF, an official of the Basilan Ceasefire Committee. Jakilan had assisted government officials headed by Congressman Ermita in the negotiation that led to the safe release of Fr. Nacorda, an act for which he was given personal thanks by President Ramos during the turn-over ceremony in Manila for Fr. Nacorda.

On the day I received the MNLF report, I immediately sent an urgent message to Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman of GRP-JCC to initiate some positive actions as in the past to remedy the situation, calling for the immediate withdrawal of the Army units from that area to avoid further escalation of the fighting.<sup>37</sup> I also talked to Congressman Ermita by telephone and I urged him to advise the AFP High Command in Manila to take the usual positive remedial measures.

I called the MNLF Chairman in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to brief him on the situation, and he instructed me to coordinate with the GRP Peace Panel. In my letter to Ambassador Yan, I urged him to do something about the situation so that further escalation of the fighting could be avoided in the interest of the Peace Talks and in the spirit of confidence building.<sup>38</sup>

In my meeting with Ambassador Damanik and MNLF officials of Support Committee on Defense headed by Dr. Manjoorsa, the Ambassador told us that Defense Secretary De Villa had reported that the GRP was halting the assault and would allow the Joint Ceasefire Committee to investigate the situation in Pilas and Tuburan, all in Basilan.<sup>39</sup>

Then, the Basilan Joint Ceasefire Committee met in Isabela City on June 8, a meeting attended by GRP and MNLF representatives, wherein the military explained their side, the MNLF justified their defense of the areas, and both parties came up with remedial measures to stop the fighting.<sup>40</sup>

## he 5<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting

*Davao City.* As committed to earlier by no less than President Ramos, the 5<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting was convened in the Davao Insular Hotel, Davao City from June 19-23. The same parties came, “gallant fellow travelers in the journey to peace” as introduced by GRP Panel Head Ambassador Yan in his Opening Statements. Dr. Hassan Wirajuda and Indonesian Ambassador to Manila, Pieter Damanik, represented Indonesia as Chairman of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six; Ambassador Rajab A. Azzarouq represented Libya; and Ambassador Muhammad Mohsin and Dr. Ali Mustafa Zwawi, Director for Islamic Communities Department in the OIC represented the OIC Secretary General. The OIC Ceasefire Observer Team headed by Brig. Gen. Asmardi Arbi observed the meeting.

The MNLF came in with more than a hundred members of its delegation headed by Chairman Misuari. It was also during this time that Dr. Parouk Muhammad Hussein, Chairman of MNLF Foreign Relations Committee, arrived in the country to join the MNLF Panel.

The parties were aware of the progress of the previous meetings in which, though some agreed-upon points had been accumulated, there had still been a failure to arrive at a consensus on the more substantive issues. Dr. Hassan, Chair of the Mixed Committee, set the tone of the meeting when he declared at the Opening Ceremony, that it was “intended not only to follow up on what we accomplished during the two rounds of Formal Peace Talks...and the four previous Mixed Committee Meetings..., but also to finalize the results achieved at the Support Committee level.”<sup>41</sup> Dr. Hassan also alluded to the Ipil incident, which he said, had “tested the faith and sincerity of both sides.”<sup>42</sup> The JCC, according to him, made remarkable accomplishments in coming up with some measures including the “excellent security arrangements for this meeting.”<sup>43</sup>

Ambassador Yan referred to the “international—as well as a national—significance of this gathering”. He emphasized, “If we succeed in waging the peace in this part of the land, we will not only gain security and prosperity for the people of Southern Philippines, but for all the peoples and nations across the wide expanse of the East Asia Growth Area.... It is an opportunity we must firmly grasp for the sake of our succeeding generations.”<sup>44</sup>

Referring to the gains already achieved, Ambassador Yan said, "Our peace process could have never reached this auspicious stage without the profound and deeply-entrenched commitment to peace of the distinguished Chairman of the MNLF, Professor Nur Misuari and all his leaders and constituents."<sup>45</sup>

The representative of the OIC Secretary General, Ambassador Mohsin, reiterated the OIC's appreciation of President Ramos' policy "based on the peaceful solution of the armed conflicts including the conflict in Southern Philippines without reproach or submission, but rather with honor to all the concerned parties."<sup>46</sup> He also confirmed the commitment of the OIC "to extend its full support and assistance so as to realize a just, comprehensive and final peaceful settlement of the issue of the Muslims of Southern Philippines within the framework of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines."<sup>47</sup> The reason for this he said was that "our age is characterized by a growing recognition that reconciliation, dialogue and understanding constitute the only basis for the realization of durable peace."<sup>48</sup>

When his turn came, Chairman Misuari talked about his consultations with various sectors in Davao City and his "very fruitful consultations with our people in Sulu and Zamboanga City...and the Chairman and members of the Davao Chamber of Commerce and Industry...and Honorable Mayor Rodrigo Duterte" whom he described as "one of the strongest advocate[s] of peace in this part of the world" much needed "to help us preside over the destiny of this part of the Philippines, if not the whole country."<sup>49</sup> He also cited President Ramos's widely-quoted statement: "after our successful meeting in Zamboanga City, that the Regional Provisional Government can be established before the end of the year."<sup>50</sup>

Chairman Misuari declared, "I came here with the mandate from our people...I requested the Secretary General of the MNLF Central Committee to call a meeting of the leaders...I'm going to Davao City and I need their mandate...I cannot go to Davao without full mandate from the people, because the people are the repository of authority."<sup>51</sup>

In the first plenary session that **followed (June 20)**, the parties, at the suggestion of Dr. Hassan, adopted a modified format: 'informal caucuses' would be created to follow-up discussions of the reports of the Support Committees before the issues were brought

to the Plenary Session; GRP and MNLF representatives would sit in this Caucus to be presided by the Representative from the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six (Indonesian Delegation). Ambassador Yan responded positively to the suggestion saying, "Parallel meetings would speed up the works since it encourages more personalized interactions between members of the Panels."<sup>52</sup> Chairman Misuari also agreed with the new format stating that "the 'Informal Caucus' to be done before the Plenary Session would further expedite the works and therefore would create a more refined atmosphere for debate and interactions..." but cautioned that "the Mixed Committee is not a negotiating Panel and it aims to assist the works of the Support Committees."<sup>53</sup>

Under this working arrangements, Informal Caucus #1 was assigned the subject "On the Setting Up of the Transitional Implementing Structure and Mechanism"; Informal Caucus #2 tackled "National Defense and Security"; Informal Caucus #3 handled "Economic and Financial Systems, Mines and Minerals"; Informal Caucus #4 was assigned the Judiciary and Introduction of Shariah; and Informal Caucus #5 handled the issue on the "Interim Regional Legislative Assembly". These 'Informal Caucuses', Dr. Hassan emphasized, "would tackle issues that have not been resolved in the past meetings."<sup>54</sup> Support Committee #2 (Education) could present their progress report without going through the caucus.

In the afternoon of the same day, the 'Informal Caucuses' held parallel meetings in the different function rooms in the hotel and the MNLF Chairman continued to receive visitors who came in to see him.

*The First Misuari-Torres Meeting.* In the early morning of June 21, Congressman Ermita called to inform me about the arrival of Executive Secretary Ruben Torres and to request that arrangements be made for a private meeting between the two 'classmates'<sup>55</sup>, Torres and Chairman Misuari, as the former had come with instructions from President Ramos.<sup>56</sup>

When the two friends met, both men embraced like long-lost brothers in front of Congressman Ermita, Assistant Secretary Jovenal Lazaga<sup>57</sup> and me. That joyful and brotherly meeting had to be cut short, however, for Chairman Misuari to attend the session of Informal Caucus #1 scheduled to meet that morning. In the evening, the two



had dinner in Secretary Torres' Executive Suite where they were joined by then Presidential Adviser on Mindanao Affairs, Secretary Paul Dominguez and Congressman Ermita. Dominguez left early but Congressman Ermita stayed with them. I stayed in one corner of the room with Assistant Secretary Lazaga, Secretary Torres' assistant. Chairman Misuari and Secretary Torres would occasionally walk to that corner of the room to stretch their legs and keep awake. It was a long meeting that lasted into the wee hours of the morning.

The following day (June 22), the plenary session resumed. It tackled the reports of Informal Caucuses so far achieved the previous day. In the discussion that followed, Ambassador Yan mentioned the "offers for MNLF representation in the Central Government, Congress and in the Office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives."<sup>58</sup> This was in response to the proposal of Chairman Misuari for representation in all levels of government.<sup>59</sup>

Mr. Abdullah Sukarta of Jakarta, an acknowledged Indonesian expert on Shariah, presented the report of Informal Caucus #5 on this issue. At this juncture, Ambassador Yan said that Shariah would be subjected to the authority of the Philippine Supreme Court to which Chairman Misuari agreed, "provided that it would not infringe on the status of Autonomy."<sup>60</sup> Chairman Misuari then proposed "the creation of a body in the Supreme Court to be composed of experts in Shariah" to which Ambassador Yan replied by suggesting "a provision specifying the appointment of one Deputy Court Administrator coming from the Autonomous Region."<sup>61</sup> In order to study the issue more thoroughly, Ambassador Yan suggested that they "request the service of retired Justices such as Justice Bedin to help"; Chairman Misuari then recommended the names of Muslim Justices Isnani and Rasul and Muslim Judge Amin. The session ended with many substantial points reached for final approval in the Formal Talks.

*The Executive Session.* After dinner, an Executive Session was arranged at the request of the Chairman of the Mixed Committee. Only two representatives from each party were invited: Dr. Hassan came with Ambassador Damanik, two OIC officials accompanied by Ambassador Rajab, Ambassador Yan and Congressman Ermita, and Chairman Misuari and Secretary General Muslim Sema. I sat beside my counterpart in the Joint Secretariat, Ms. Yuli Mumpuni of the

Indonesian Embassy, to record the proceedings.

Dr. Hassan opened the meeting by defining the agenda: to find the best possible way for the talks to move forward. Ambassador Yan then outlined the GRP proposal on “two tracts”. The “first tract” was for the MNLF Chairman to run in the ARMM election in March 1996 as Regional Governor under the banner of the LAKAS-NUCD-UMDP (The Administration Party). This would place the MNLF in leadership and governance, giving the people of Mindanao an idea of their ability to govern. The “second tract” was the establishment of the Provisional Government via constitutional process upon the termination of the ARMM in March 1996. An “Enabling Act” containing the agreement would be passed in Congress. The President was determined to push through with this plan with the support of Congress. If the second tract could be completed before March 1996 including the holding of the plebiscite, the first one (participation in the ARMM election) would not even have to be resorted to.

Chairman Misuari responded in an atmosphere that was conducive to very honest and candid presentations of opinion. Chairman Misuari’s heart and mind must have been softened by his previous meetings with his best friend, Ruben Torres. He said, “the proposal (to accept the ARMM and for him to run as Governor) is very sensitive as it implies giving in, capitulating to GRP. It might wreak havoc in the MNLF leadership.” He emphasized the point that “There is need to consult our leaders...without consultation with our leaders, it is very difficult for us to make any meaningful comment on this subject. We really need time to consult our leaders.”

He recalled a time in 1976, saying, “We accepted the OIC Resolution changing our objective from Independence to Autonomy. That led to the division with Salamat Hashim. We almost lost the whole of Mindanao because they controlled the Ulama... but we managed to consolidate the leadership.” He continued, saying, “with respect to the second tract, it is natural for the GRP to do this...I understand because this is your law if you interpret it in that light...but there should be a way out of this...with regard to the Provisional Government...As the Honorable Executive Secretary told us last night, I called him Ben, and he calls me Nur, because we were very close during our U.P days. On several occasions, we were always together courting friends, when I courted my first wife, he

would always be there, when he also courted his wife, I would also be there...that's how close we were. He told me this is not a game. The President is very serious and he will use his power to insure the implementation of the Agreement...there is that commitment...therefore, if we take this assurance in its face value, and I have no reason to doubt him (Torres), because Ben is a very honest man, the Ben that I know, then we should be able to devise a way to take advantage of the seriousness of the President...if we assume that the President is indeed serious, I think the Provisional Government will not be much of a problem...some lawyers can easily justify this."

He also recalled what he did in the First Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta where he read that legal note written by Peace Advocate Atty. Soliman Santos, Jr. "I was very sorry that I...in my enthusiasm to convince you that there is really no need to go into all these tortuous process[es]...if we can pursue this line of thought, we have the President who is determined to implement this thing and we have these two houses (the Senate and the House of Representatives) behind him...if the President will support this plan, it will even endear him with the people...with the sentiments now being generated by the Peace Process..."

Congressman Ermita then contributed his thoughts on the matter. He recalled the long hours spent with Secretary Torres (the previous night) and added "personally, from the time we've met in Tripoli in 1992 up to the present, I can attest to the sincerity of the MNLF leadership in really trying to end the trouble in Mindanao...to the extent that right now in the House of Representatives, I am always called the representative of the MNLF...because I believed in what we are doing. Many things had been said especially by Secretary Torres really on the sincerity of the President. So, we can forge peace...and we are happy to note that since then up to the present, we have been able to improve goodwill, first around us and as you can see that before...somehow we were able to cross the threshold of the differences with Congresswoman Lobregat and she welcomed us in Zamboanga City. And here in Northern Mindanao...we were welcomed by the government." Congressman Ermita continued by expressing his commitment to help push through with the plan with House Speaker Jose de Venecia. He also encouraged Chairman Misuari

to continue with his consultation in Mindanao because it would generate confidence in the Peace Process.

Hassan then reminded the body about “benchmark date as discussed earlier in the Second Round of Formal Talks”. Yan responded by saying, “All points of consensus are expected to be consolidated in October 1995...we have to attain a breakthrough...after the Mixed Committee Meeting, we have to wind up all technical works...the President will start talking to all key political leaders...the time factor is applicable to both tracts.”

Misuari then raised the issue of renewing the mandate of the OIC Ceasefire Observers and that he observed that SOUTHCOM officials were not cooperating. Ambassador Damanik said, “for the sake of peace, the OIC Observer Team will remain, although the personnel may change, until the plebiscite is over.” Congressman Ermita recalled, “In the 1977 Ceasefire, there were incidents in between which led to the breakdown of the talks. But with the OIC Observer Team around this time and the JCC is still intact, this is really of great help to the situation.”

Mohsin said, “We are concerned here with the time table—*we are racing against time*.” Yan said, “We can review the time table.”

The Executive Session adjourned at midnight, and the breakthrough meeting came to an end. For the first time since October 1992, the parties to the talks had virtually laid the cards open in a very candid and honest manner. It was indeed a step forward for the MNLF but more so for the government. *The GRP, through Secretary Ruben Torres, Ambassador Yan and Congressman Ermita, had ‘broken through the heart of the MNLF’.*

That was the most revealing session I had witnessed in twenty years since the start of the GRP- MNLF negotiations in 1975 under the auspices of the OIC. The MNLF Chairman sounded accommodating and open to suggestions from the GRP even if those were contrary to his previous positions. This was a far cry from the saber-rattling statements he had been issuing in the past. *That Executive Session was the very vision that Ambassador Yan had intimated to me in our meeting last May 10.*

The Mixed Committee Meeting also ended after the Fourth Session on June 23 with the following results:

1. **Informal Caucus #1 (Transitional Implementing Structure):** Six points of consensus were reached on the structure of the Provisional Government but the proposed mechanism submitted by the GRP with three features (Enabling Act, Plebiscite and the establishment of the Provisional Government at the end of the term of the ARMM) remained unresolved. The most contentious item was the issue of the plebiscite. The MNLF insisted that the Provisional Government be established without plebiscite. The Committee agreed to hold the matter in abeyance for further discussion.
2. **Informal Caucus #2(National Defense):** Three points of consensus were reached on the joining of the MNLF forces with the AFP, the setting up of the Special Regional Security Force (SRSF), and the position of Deputy Commander for MNLF Forces. The two points of no-consensus were: proportionate representation of the MNLF in the AFP and the relationship between the SRSF and the Autonomous Government.
3. **Informal Caucus #3 (Economics):** Three points of consensus were reached on the establishment of Islamic Banking and two points of consensus were reached on the establishment of economic zones in the area of autonomy like that of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority. However, the Mixed Committee instructed the Support Committee #3 to study further the remaining unresolved issues on revenue sharing and the sharing of income from Government-Owned and Controlled Corporations (GOCC) operating in the area of Autonomy.
- 4) **Informal Caucus #4 (Shariah):** The Mixed Committee, after reviewing the progress of discussion, agreed to strengthen Support Committee #5 (Shariah) with the MNLF Panel recommending five Muslim legal experts to help in the future meetings.
- 5) **Informal Caucus #5 (Administration and Representation):** Points of consensus were reached on general principles of law and lawmaking. The Committee, however, noted the fact that Support Committee #4 needed more time to study the remaining unresolved issues further.
- 6) **Support Committee #2 (Education):** Six points of consensus were to be submitted to the Formal Talks for approval. Two points of no-consensus (on the issue of administration of the educational system and the Mindanao State University) were also to be submitted for further study.

Back in Manila, acting as the MNLF Emissary, I visited Ambassador Yan to seek advice regarding establishing contacts with Executive Secretary Ruben Torres. Ambassador Yan encouraged the idea because Secretary Torres was supportive of the GRP Panel; besides, he and Chairman Misuari had already met in Davao. The initiatives to establish contacts with him were movements in the right

direction and could even open up direct line of communication for the MNLF from Malacanang and vice versa.

*June 30.* I met with Secretary Torres in the latter's office in Malacanang. Secretary Torres related to four leaders from Maguindanao<sup>62</sup> some of the basic issues he had discussed with the MNLF Chairman during their first meeting in Davao and said that he was looking forward to the day when he and his friend Nur would work together on national issues as national leaders the way they thought would be their role when they were still in the University of the Philippines.

Secretary Torres also invited me to join him in meeting with the President during the Summit of Mindanao Leaders scheduled on July 2 in General Santos City. I politely declined the invitation as I was also proceeding to that area but would have to see the MNLF Chairman first who was then holding consultations in South Cotabato.

The Mindanao Peace and Development Summit in General Santos City was a follow-up of the first one earlier held in Zamboanga City on May 27. President Ramos presided over these summits personally as "the MNLF committed itself to increase the tempo of its consultations among its constituents."<sup>63</sup> In the General Santos City Summit, the GRP "had already a draft Mindanao Agenda for Peace and Development."<sup>64</sup> In the Third Summit held in Cagayan de Oro City on August 25-26, President Ramos "created and mobilized the Legion of Peace and Development Advocates for Mindanao (LEPAD)."<sup>65</sup>

While the Summit was going on in General Santos City, President Ramos sent his key Cabinet Members to meet with the MNLF Chairman in an MNLF Camp in Lumatil about one (1) hour by land from the City. President Ramos revealed later that he "sent them there to convey our sustained commitment to find a way out of the difficulties being encountered on the matter of the provisional government, and to discuss the options we were proposing to the MNLF leadership."<sup>66</sup> The Delegation was composed of Secretary Torres, DILG Secretary Rafael Alunan, DILG Undersecretary Alexander P. Aguirre, Muslim Affairs Executive Director Dimas Pundato and his Deputy, Hadji Abdullah Camlian.<sup>67</sup>

*July 2.* I arrived at the MNLF Camp in Lumatil, Sarangani in the

evening and reported to the MNLF Chairman the progress of MNLF Secretariat works and gave him copies of the Report of the Chairman of the Mixed Committee on the Results of the 5<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting held earlier in Davao City. I then joined the Chairman Misuari in making courtesy calls on General Santos City Mayor Hon. Rosalita Nunez and Sarangani Governor, Hon. Priscilla Chiongbian. The MNLF Secretariat also assisted the MNLF-JCC in getting clearance from the GRP Panel regarding the consultation visits of the Chairman in South Cotabato.

Back in Manila, the MNLF Secretariat coordinated the meetings of Support Committees #3 and #4 met in Sulo Hotel and the scheduled Consultation visit of the MNLF to Palawan.

*July 13.* I received a telephone call from House Speaker Jose De Venecia who invited me to a private meeting in his Makati residence wherein he requested that I arrange his meeting with the MNLF Chairman in Mindanao so that he could present some important proposals and discuss development programs for the region. In an earlier meeting in his office the previous day, the Speaker sounded me out about my representing the MNLF in Congress as Sectoral Representative. "Being the Spokesman of the MNLF, you can continue speaking for them in Congress," the Speaker said. I thanked him for the suggestion but politely declined the offer, assuring him that his message would reach the MNLF Chairman.

### **The Consultations in Palawan**

*July 15.* I joined Misuari in Palawan for consultations with the people. Initially, the local officials in Palawan had opposed this, though Mayor Hagedorn later welcomed the visit. The MNLF Secretariat immediately issued a statement in response to that goodwill gesture of Mayor Hagedorn.<sup>68</sup> The following was the Press statements released:

MNLF Chairman Misuari and the entire MNLF Leadership salute the Honorable Mayor Edward Hagedorn of Puerto Princesa for officially welcoming the visit of the MNLF Chairman to Palawan. The MNLF Chairman noted that this is another positive step forward in the Filipino people's noble quest for just and lasting peace.

In this historic visit to Palawan, the MNLF Chairman brings the universal

message of peace and brotherhood to the people of Palawan and galvanize President Ramos' program of national reconciliation and unity for the Filipino people.

The great majority of the people of Palawan should not be deprived of the opportunity to be consulted by the MNLF Leadership. This is the essence of democracy.

The Honorable Mayor Rodrigo Duterte of Davao City extended generous hospitality to the MNLF Chairman and his party in the last GRP-MNLF Mixed Committee Meeting. It was the good Mayor's way of honoring the dawn of peace in Mindanao. We cannot buy peace. It is priceless. We can only attain it through goodwill and mutual trust.

We urge, therefore, the good people of Palawan to support the call for Peace and rally behind the leadership of Governor Socrates and Mayor Hagedorn in supporting the peace initiatives of President Ramos through the GRP Panel and the MNLF in forging just, genuine and honorable peace.

Misuari and his party arrived by Navy boat and entered Puerto Princesa unarmed and without any armed escorts. Even the members of the Philippine Marines were unarmed. This was at the request of Mayor Hagedorn because Puerto Princesa had been known as a gunless city.

The consultation was well-attended. Local officials headed by the Honorable Governor Salvador Socrates and Mayor Hagedorn were present, along with Former House Speaker Ramon Mitra.

Reacting to the negative statements of certain Philippine lawmakers who criticized the stand of the MNLF on constitutional process, we said:<sup>69</sup>

The MNLF leadership, being products of Philippine liberal education, have high respects for Philippine lawmakers. It is natural that these lawmakers will insist on constitutional process to resolve the conflict in Mindanao. Their duty to uphold and defend the Constitution is well recognized.

But making irresponsible and unfounded accusations against the peacemakers in the ongoing talks will just play into the hands of those who do not want peace in the country.

While constitutional process is naturally considered by the GRP Panel as the best legal option to implement the Tripoli Agreement, it is the better part of wisdom not to be too legalistic about the issue. Constitutional process should facilitate rather than impede the peace process.



We believed that in the higher interest of peace and justice, the Philippine legal system cannot be too rigid as not to allow the Chief Executive of the Land to institute certain transitional measures like the establishment of the Provisional Government as called for in the Tripoli Agreement in order to give chance to the people of Mindanao to work out the agenda for genuine and honorable peace.

Peace is the supreme justification for the existence of government. It is the ultimate objective of the social contract— for the leaders to ensure the maintenance of peace and administer justice.

The spirit of the law is justice. And justice means giving every one his or her due. Giving justice to the Moro people, Muslims, Christians and Highlanders in Mindanao, which is historically due them is the spirit of the law. Peace and justice in Mindanao will certainly redound to the benefit of the entire Filipino people and the people of the region of Southeast Asia in general.

The MNLF Chairman is taking the high road to peace. And peace cannot be achieved by government alone. Peace can only be attained with the support of all people concerned. Anything designed to achieve peace will be supported by the people. Anything that derails the attainment of peace will be rejected by the people.

## **The Meeting with House Speaker Jose De Venecia**

The meeting with Speaker De Venecia was scheduled on July 19 in Pagadian City. I accompanied Speaker De Venecia in a private jet from Manila to Pagadian City. Also in the group were Congressmen Ermita and Jaafar and Dr. Tham Manjoorsa of the MNLF. Zamboanga del Sur Governor Isidoro Real joined the group upon arrival in the City. The MNLF Chairman was accompanied by MNLF Vice Chairman Hatimil Hassan and MNLF Chief of Staff Gen. Yusop Jikiri.

It was a very important meeting. The Speaker presented various programs to the President for the development of Mindanao.<sup>70</sup>

What he presented to the MNLF Chairman can be summarized as follows:

- That the prospects were bright for advancing the Peace Process;
- That there was an MNLF coalition with the LAKAS-NUCD-UMDP to achieve power sharing and burden sharing. The MNLF would become co-leaders of a recognized Political Party;

- That this arrangement would ensure that not only the Government but also the Party in power would be moving;
- That the coalition would also help the MNLF move forward and promote the Autonomous Regional Government in Mindanao;
- That there was a proposal to come up with an Enabling Act, and that while this was in the process, the MNLF could assume leadership in the ARMM. The Speaker would sponsor the Enabling Act for approval by Congress;
- That President Ramos could appoint one Sectoral Representative in Congress to represent the MNLF;
- That Economic development was deemed important. The Liguasan Marsh in Cotabato would be developed and Tawi-Tawi converted into a Free Trade Zone;
- That, though many leaders were vying for the leadership of the ARMM, it was Chairman Misuari who should be leader because of the overwhelming respect and following he commanded and because his heart and soul were committed to uplifting the plight of the Muslims;
- That a Special Ambassador to the OIC was needed; and
- That The President was ready to appoint a member of the Cabinet from Mindanao.

The MNLF Chairman's response can be summarized as follows:

- That coalition with a political party was too early at that time and they had to consult their leaders;
- That a proposal regarding this could be written to identify its advantages and possible effects on the peace process;
- That a continuity of leadership in order to attain a climate attractive to investors was needed;
- That, regarding the ARMM election, the people looked up to the MNLF as the instrument of change, and that it was too early to express anything as consultations were required especially since people were skeptical of the performance of the ARMM; and
- That the peace and order situation had to be examined.

This meeting with Speaker De Venecia certainly added confidence to the MNLF and the Peace Process. Despite the cautious response of the Chairman Misuari, couched in very diplomatic terms, the

proposals of Speaker De Venecia could not be rejected outright. He was, after all, the Speaker of Philippine Congress and Secretary General of the then powerful and influential LAKAS-NUCD Administration Party.

A follow-up of the De Venecia proposal was made by Congressman Nur Jaafar in our telephone conversation on the evening of July 20. According to him, in the spirit of enhancing the peace process and strengthening confidence-building measures, the following could be nominated by the MNLF Chairman:

- One Sectoral Representative in the House
- One Consultant, Office of the Speaker
- One Consultant, Office of the Senate President
- One Consultant, Office of the President

Jaafar said I could simply relay the nominees through Speaker De Venecia, Ermita, or Yan; or through him once these were cleared with Misuari. I reported this to the latter in an *aide memoire*<sup>71</sup>, arguing that, if the matter were approached within the context of reinforcing and strengthening the current Peace Process in anticipation of reaching a Final Agreement, this offer could be an initial step towards the “empowerment of our people.” From a strategic viewpoint, the MNLF could tap our supporters/sympathizers from among the Moro professionals to accept the offer in order to broaden the base of support from within the parliamentary arena. The positions to be filled up were strategically situated that when utilized in the service of the Moro struggle, they could mean a lot to our people. It should be made clear that the MNLF was not accepting the offer but merely pinpointing the credible and qualified Moro professionals who could handle the positions. *However, the MNLF Chairman rejected all of it and did not even care to respond to the offer.*

In that same *memoire*, the Secretariat reported our meeting with Libyan Ambassador Rajab on July 21 where the latter intimated to us some observations and reservations on the current developments in the Peace Process. Upon learning of the Chairman’s meeting with Speaker De Venecia, the Ambassador thought that the meeting had been initiated by the MNLF. I told him, however, that it was the Speaker’s initiative. He then recalled that during the meeting in Davao, Ambassador Mohsin had been restless about the perceived

“weakening” of the MNLF position as they noticed during that Executive session in the evening.

I suggested that the MNLF Chairman meet with Ambassador Rajab and Ambassador Mohsin before any formal meeting with the GRP to reassure the OIC people of the firmness of the MNLF position. I felt it was understandable that the OIC, especially Libya, wanted to promote their image as power broker and major actor in the just settlement of the Mindanao conflict.

On July 23, the MNLF Chairman was in Cotabato City for consultation with the local officials. He was also invited to a briefing by the Regional Development Council and by then ARMM Governor Lininding Pangandaman.<sup>72</sup>

### **The 6<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting**

As agreed upon earlier in the Davao Meeting, the 6<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting took place in General Santos City from July 26 to 28, 1995. The same members of the Panels came.

Immediately after the usual opening ceremony, an executive session was convened where the GRP Panel presented a written document containing a “two-track proposal” which was adopted as an official document for consideration.<sup>73</sup> The MNLF Panel responded by saying that the document would be submitted to the MNLF leadership meeting for consideration before it could make its formal reply.

The session then proceeded with the discussion of the other agenda items. At one point in the discussion, the MNLF Chairman became emphatic when he elaborated on the issue of the competence of the people in Mindanao to make laws of their own and to run the affairs of the Region. He said that in his consultations in Mindanao, he had met many responsible leaders who could equal the best in the country. He said, *“If the government is expecting us to trust them and to give faith in their competence to lead the nation, they should also have the confidence in our capacity to lead this part of the region.”*<sup>74</sup> *“We might even be able to produce better quality members of the Legislative Assembly than you have in your Congress.... We are not just going to choose this and that people. We will get the most responsible people in our society, those people whose names are very clean and have no stigma whatsoever*

*before the public eyes. We will not allow corrupt officials to join us....No goons, no gold...no terrorism will be tolerated...because we will defeat our purpose in sacrificing so [many] lives if in the end we will only fall back to the same system. We will ensure that there will be [a] clean and honest system here. Otherwise, we will consider our struggle and the sacrifices of 200,000 lives just a waste.*"<sup>75</sup>

At the end of the second day, the heads of the respective delegations signed the list of the ten points of consensus reached: two on Education and eight on Administrative System, Executive Council, Legislative Assembly and Representation and Participation in the Central Government.<sup>76</sup>

The Meeting also commended the performance of the OIC Observer Team and agreed to request the Indonesian Government to extend the tour of duty of the Observer Team at least up to March 1996.<sup>77</sup>

In the Press Conference that followed the Closing Ceremony, Ambassador Yan revealed to the media the GRP Proposal saying, "We are working under time constraint under this proposal and it may come too fast that we may have no time before March 1996....If this first option is not accomplished before the year ends, both panels will have to wait another three years due to the existing autonomy in Mindanao...."<sup>78</sup>

In the matter of the MNLF participation in the ARMM, Ambassador Yan said, "if the MNLF Chairman will agree to become a candidate, he will be supported by the Administration LAKAS-NUCD political party."<sup>79</sup>

However, the progress of the talks did not improve because of the GRP proposal. In fact, Ambassador Rajab even intimated to the MNLF Secretariat that he sensed a hardening of positions from both sides that would lead to a possible impasse. He did not expect the MNLF to accept the GRP offer as contained in the *aide memoire* presented in the meeting, for the idea was too early to be considered. The Mixed Committee meeting reached consensus only on lighter issues, but the more substantial ones remained unresolved or showed no signs of moving forward. He then thought of suggesting to the OIC officials that the matter be elevated to the OIC Committee of Six for top-level consultations.

## MNLF Leadership Meeting, Jolo, Sulu

*August 8.* MNLF leaders from all over Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan gathered in Jolo for the leadership meeting. The MNLF Chairman was present but requested MNLF Secretary General Muslimin Sema to preside over the meeting. After the opening prayers, the Secretary General opened the meeting by announcing the main agenda: the GRP Proposal submitted formally in the last Mixed Committee meeting with the following features:

1. MNLF participation in the 1996 ARMM election;
2. A Presidential Consultant; one Sectoral Representation in Congress; a consultant in the Office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives; a consultant in the Office of the Senate President;
3. GRP to pass an Enabling Act in Congress subject to plebiscite before the installation of the Provisional Government.

A separate item in the agenda was about MNLF organizational matters.

MNLF Vice Chairman Hatimil Hassan took the floor to explain that the first three agenda items were presented officially by the GRP Panel in the last Mixed Committee Meeting and reiterated by Speaker De Venecia in his meeting with the MNLF Chairman in Pagadian City.

In the voting that followed, the leaders were *unanimous in rejecting the GRP offers*. An MNLF Provincial Chairman even suggested removing item No. 3 (the Enabling Act) from the agenda, a suggestion to which the body unanimously agreed. A Shariah lawyer from Maguindanao took the floor to suggest that Muslims should be given preference in the matter of appointment or election for higher office in the Autonomous Region in order to be consistent with “our Islamic ideology”, but Brig. Gen. Alfatah Abubakar<sup>80</sup> responded by saying that the suggestion could not be considered, being contrary to the MNLF policy of “equal treatment among Muslims, Christians and Highlanders in the Region”. Ustadz Murshi Ibrahim<sup>81</sup> supported the declaration of Commander Alfatah, saying, “The suggestion is un-Islamic.” The Shariah lawyer, sensing no popular support on his move, withdrew his suggestion.

It was then that the MNLF Chairman entered the Session Hall on the fifth floor of the *Sarang Bangun*<sup>82</sup> building in Jolo. Having

been informed of the results of the first session, the Chairman then proceeded to talk about the policies and rules of the MNLF, which the MNLF Secretariat summarized as follows:

The MNLF leadership makes decisions based on the Islamic principle of *Shura*<sup>83</sup> (mutual consultation). There are three levels of MNLF decision-making process. The first one, which is the base, is the General Membership Meeting (GM). All members of the MNLF are entitled to attend this meeting. This is the meeting that we are holding today. The second level is the Leadership Meeting (LM). Only the leaders of the MNLF including ground commanders are entitled to attend this meeting. These two levels of meeting are deliberative in nature, conducted in the spirit of give and take, brotherhood and understanding. We are always guided by the Truth as embodied in the Qur'an. But Truth cannot be reached unless we use reason because Islam is a rational religion, in harmony with nature, truth and logic. We belong to an Islamic Movement and, as such, Truth is our key to success and to our future. We all came from one *Bangsa* (nation) differentiated into tribes; from tribes to clans; from clans to families; there is always motivation of certain interest in every level. Our basic policy therefore is Truth and Maximum Tolerance. Within the Leadership Meeting (LM), there is still the "inner core group" who handles the very critical and pivotal issues in arriving at our final decision.

Afterwards, the MNLF Secretary-General summarized the points taken up in the meeting as unanimously agreed as follows:

1. The rejection of the GRP Proposals, particularly the Organic Act and the ARMM as this had already been rejected in the Jakarta Formal Talks
2. The preparation by the Secretariat of a written reply to the GRP copy furnished the OIC
3. The discussion of MNLF organizational during the Leadership Meeting at a later date

The "inner core group" referred to by the MNLF Chairman met in the evening and made their decision, to uphold that of the General Membership meeting, as reported by one of them to the MNLF Secretariat later. A few days after this, the MNLF Chairman left Jolo, passing through Tawi-Tawi for consultations and then proceeding to Sabah for his final exit to Saudi Arabia.

Back in Manila, the Indonesian Embassy officials were preparing for the arrival of Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas to Manila on September 6. They were also awaiting the MNLF response to the GRP proposal for them to brief the Indonesian Foreign Minister. However, there was no official response yet made in writing from the MNLF Chairman.

*September 2.* Secretary-General Muslimin Sema arrived in Manila, bringing with him the original copy of the letter of the MNLF Chairman addressed to Speaker De Venecia dated August 29, 1995 (See Annex L). In the General Santos Mixed Committee Meeting, the MNLF Chairman committed to make a reply in writing, after the MNLF Leadership Meeting, to the Chairman of the Mixed Committee (Indonesia). The OIC and the GRP Panel were therefore expecting this very vital information from the MNLF, which was also why the Indonesian Embassy officials continued to ask the MNLF Secretariat about this MNLF reply.

*September 4.* The MNLF met with Ambassador Rajab first in the morning. Secretary General Sema briefed the Ambassador on the results of the MNLF Leadership Meeting and the position taken by the MNLF in that meeting vis-à-vis the GRP proposal as contained in the *aide memoire*. The MNLF official response was to be presented formally and in writing in the Jakarta Formal Talks. As usual, Ambassador Rajab would relay this information to Congressman Ermita and the GRP Panel.

In the afternoon, the MNLF had another meeting with Ambassador Damanik. SG Mus Sema relayed the same information to Ambassador Damanik about the MNLF official response. Then, Ambassador Damanik informed the MNLF that some GRP officials were already talking about this response as there must have been an unauthorized leakage of information. Though he thanked the MNLF officials for giving him that vital information, as he was now in a better position to report to Minister Alatas (who was coming to Manila) the real stand of the MNLF on the latest GRP proposal, he also expressed the difficulty of Indonesia in bridging the gap between the MNLF and GRP on the issue of Provisional Government. While he admitted to have understood the position of the MNLF, he stated that Indonesia, as a constitutional government, could not deny recognition of the GRP position based on constitutional process. He expressed Jakarta's hopes, however, that positive developments would take place before the expected Jakarta Formal Talks in October 1995.

Basically, the MNLF Chairman's letter to Speaker De Venecia contained the following four important issues:

1. **Regarding the Proposal related to the ARMM:** The MNLF Leadership...think[s] that the ARMM is not the kind of solution called for



in the Tripoli Agreement.... We have always from the beginning denounced the ARMM as a flagrant deviation from the letter and spirit of the Tripoli agreement.... It will not bring any genuine solution to the problem in Mindanao....It will only encourage people to resort to other options, which could compound or complicate matters irretrievably. Since the ARMM is a mere administrative autonomy....[Since] the territory is less than what is envisaged in the Tripoli Agreement, three things can possibly happen: 1) the OIC might be compelled to dissociate itself from the peace process; 2) the MNLF leaders in the area that might be excluded from the autonomy might be so displeased that they might join hands with other organizations who are seeking independence from Mindanao and its islands; and 3) The MNLF leadership might irreparably suffer a loss of credibility among the people, such that the ARMM autonomy might easily fall through. Hence, our peace endeavors might merely result in an exercise in futility.

2. **Regarding Enabling Act Proposal:** This will not provide [a] solution to the Bangsamoro problem....It will only prolong the time frame...either by acts of the Philippine Congress and/or the Philippine Senate or by the opposition of certain politicians and plain citizens who are out to obstruct the path of peace for their own selfish motives.
3. **Regarding the Proposal over the forging of a Coalition with the present Ruling Coalition Parties:** [This] sounds quite attractive to many of our leaders...however...it is not necessary at the moment...because by the logic of the success of the peace process, the MNLF and the Autonomous Government will after all become a natural partner of the Ruling Coalition in deciding the fate of the nation....The MNLF and our people will be grateful to whoever would be responsible in bringing about the success of the peace process.
4. **Regarding the proposal to finish the Peace Process before the establishment of the Grand Alliance, even to the extent of postponing the ARMM election for three to six months:** This is a...pragmatic and enlightened [idea]...therefore there should be no difficulty in accepting the proposition eventually. The idea is to finish the talks first and then establish the Grand Alliance later...

I would personally deliver the letter of the MNLF Chairman to the office of Speaker De Venecia in Congress with the assistance of Congressman Ermita on September 25, 1995.

*September 6.* Minister Alatas arrived in Manila and delivered the response (to the *aide memoire* earlier sent by President Ramos) of President Suharto. In an interview with the Manila Press, Minister Alatas reaffirmed Indonesia's support to the GRP-MNLF Talks but added that Indonesia would first consult other members of the OIC

on the progress of negotiations before Jakarta decided to host another formal round of talks<sup>84</sup>. “We will continue to broker peace with the MNLF,”<sup>85</sup> he assured. President Ramos shared the optimism of President Suharto as he was quoted to have said, “MNLF Chairman Misuari has taken some encouraging steps to move the peace process forward.... We are determined to resolve the remaining issues in the negotiations.... We are trying to formulate a win-win solution possibly before the 1996 election in the ARMM.”<sup>86</sup> Reportedly, President Suharto “was confident a solution could be found which could serve both the letter and spirit of the Tripoli Agreement and our own constitution.”<sup>87</sup>

But while the Mindanao Peace Formula was being discussed in the highest echelons of government and among concerned OIC countries, the AFP was raising the specter of war in Mindanao. On September 1, the national dailies carried the warnings from the AFP. “AFP Chief warns on MNLF, Secessionists have sophisticated arms” (*Manila Standard*); “AFP plans next move in Mindanao in case peace talks collapse,” (*Malaya*); “AFP gearing for new war in the South,” (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*); “Muslim groups acquiring more guns, says Army Chief,” (*The Manila Chronicle*). However, one Mindanao-based reporter-columnist dismissed the AFP claims saying, “We have heard these lines before...It’s budget hearing time once more.”<sup>88</sup>

To the MNLF, however, the signs of an impending shooting war were real. MNLF Ceasefire Committee Chairman Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin wrote to his counterpart, Brig. Gen. Ruiz, on September 9 about Army troop movements in Basilan. His Vice Chairman, MNLF Brig. Gen. Alfatah Abubakar reported on September 10 the heavy presence of the Army in Central Mindanao, which had been arriving since May 1995. Commander Rizal<sup>89</sup>, whose MNLF camp was within the vicinity of Matanog town, also called me up by telephone from Cotabato City to report that Army troops were closing in on that area.

**September 13.** The same reports also reached Ambassador Damanik, prompting him to write Ambassador Yan. Citing those reports “which were also communicated to Your Excellency”, Ambassador Damanik wrote:

According to their reports, the GRP Armed Forces intruded and established checkpoints into the MNLF alleged identified areas in Duhul Matangal,

Tuburan, Province of Basilan; in New Carmen, Tacurong, Lemayong and Esperanza, Province of Sultan Kudarat and Barongis, S.K. Pendatun, Matanog, Barira and Buldon, Province of Maguindanao without proper coordination with the MNLF field commanders as agreed upon at the Joint Guidelines and Ground Rules for the Implementation of the 1993 Interim Ceasefire Agreement.

As Your Excellency might be aware, the 1993 Interim Ceasefire Agreement provides that the forces of both parties shall remain in their respective places and refrain from any provocative actions or any acts of hostilities. I therefore, would like to bring this matter for Your Excellency's consideration. I believed that both parties would have to continue to maintain the spirit of the Ceasefire Agreement in order to avoid unintended repercussions.

On the same day, Ambassador Damanik also sent a notice to the MNLF- GRP Joint Ceasefire Committee and the OIC Observer Team, inviting them to a Ceasefire Committee meeting on September 20-21 in Zamboanga City to take up reported ceasefire violations and other important matters.<sup>90</sup>

**September 18.** The MNLF Secretariat wrote to Ambassador Yan, upon instructions of MNLF Secretary General Muslimin Sema, about "Army troop movements with tanks and heavy weapons towards the Matanog area where the MNLF is maintaining camp...and the beefing up of Philippine Marine forces in Maimbung area in Sulu...without the usual coordination with the MNLF in accordance with the 1993 Ceasefire Agreement."<sup>91</sup>

I also made clear to Ambassador Yan that the MNLF Chairman was aware of the matter and was in a meeting with Saudi religious and business leaders in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Yet the MNLF letter still said, "Your Excellency, the MNLF Leadership hopes the GRP Panel can do something positive (on the matter) in the interest of the Peace Process."

**September 27.** During a meeting with the members of the Press at the Ciudad Fernandina Forum,<sup>92</sup> I expressed optimism, as MNLF Spokesman, on the progress of the talks, emphasizing the following points:

1. There are a good number of issues already resolved by the two Panels in the previous meetings. The issue on the Provisional Government will be the focus of discussion in the forthcoming 3<sup>rd</sup> Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta.

2. The MNLF is not recruiting more members in violation of the Ceasefire Agreement. The people in the region are with us because we are working towards the attainment of peace.
3. The MILF is supportive of the stand of the MNLF in the Talks based on the Tripoli Agreement.
4. MNLF Chairman Misuari has no intention to seek elective post in the ARMM.

### **The Special OIC Meeting in New York, USA**

*October 3.* The OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six met in New York City, U.S.A. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Ali Alatas, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia and Chairman of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six in the presence of the OIC Secretary General, H. E. Dr. Hamid Algabid. Representatives at the Ministerial level from other member countries, such as People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Socialist People's Arab Jamahiriya, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Senegal and the Republic of Somalia, were also in attendance. The event was reported by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations in New York in an official Press Release as follows:

Minister Alatas briefed the Committee on the progress achieved in the negotiations between the GRP and the MNLF, under the auspices of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six, for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. The members ... welcomed the positive progress achieved so far in the negotiations.... after a fruitful exchange of views, the Committee agreed to maintain the momentum of the negotiations and to intensify efforts aimed at achieving a final solution to the problem ...The Committee decided to meet again in New York in the course of the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations.<sup>93</sup>

*October 8.* Meanwhile, an important visitor from the Middle East, the President of Iran, His Excellency, President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, arrived in Manila on a State Visit. Iran, under the leadership of the late Ayatollah Khomeini (may his soul rest in peace), was then believed to have extended recognition and support to the MNLF in the aftermath of the collapse of the GRP-MNLF negotiations in 1977. It "became the first Muslim state to impose oil embargo on the Marcos regime"<sup>94</sup> in the aftermath of what the MNLF called the "Pata Massacre" (of an island in Sulu) in 1981.

This belligerent stand of Iran was somehow tempered by the conciliatory approach of the OIC of which it is a member. In 1991, the OIC started to take note of the measures taken by the Philippine Government in peacefully resolving the problem in Southern Philippines.

This State Visit, therefore, augured well for the Ramos Administration, giving an added boost to the Peace Process. The President was given the opportunity, in his home ground, to brief the Iranian leader on the status of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. For the MNLF, the Secretariat transmitted the letter of the MNLF Secretary General to President Rafsanjani through the Iranian Ambassador to Manila with the attached MNLF Aide Memoire on the progress of the talks. In the said *memoire*, the MNLF reported to the Iranian leader the “unanimous call for peace, freedom and progress by the people...but peace with dignity, peace that will hasten the full flowering of Islam as a constructive and dynamic force in the lives of the people in the Bangsamoro Homeland.”

**October 9-10.** Support Committee #5(Shariah) met in Zamboanga City. The meeting was presided over by R. M. Talib Puspokusumo, SH of the Indonesian Embassy. Representing the GRP Panel were Hon. Justice Undersecretary Demetrio Demetria and Hon. Justice Undersecretary Paras. Sharif Zain Jali and Rev. Absalom Cerveza represented the MNLF. The SC#5 had been instructed in the past Mixed Committee Meetings to study certain unresolved issues regarding the putting up of a Special Commission to address issues on the relationship of Shariah Courts and the Supreme Court. After due deliberations, the Committee came up with three points of consensus for submission to the Mixed Committee and the Formal Talks as follows:<sup>95</sup>

1. That the Regional Legislative Assembly of the Area of Autonomy shall establish Shariah Courts with the existing laws on the matter as points of reference;
2. That the GRP shall endeavor to cause the appointment, as a member of the Judicial and Bar Council, a qualified person to be recommended by the highest authority of the said area; and
3. That the GRP shall request the Supreme Court to create the Office of the Deputy Court Administrator for the Area of Autonomy, and to appoint thereto a qualified person recommended by the highest authority of the said area.

*October 13.* I gave a briefing to the Peace Committee of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) at Sulo Hotel, at their invitation, on the progress of the peace talks, particularly on the issue of the Provisional Government. The NCCP leaders were satisfied with our presentation, saying that it was their first time to listen to a comprehensive briefing on the Mindanao Peace Process. Jam Maridul, my Deputy Chair in the Secretariat, was with me. Another important guest was Mr. Satur Ocampo, former spokesman of the National Democratic Front (NDF).<sup>96</sup>

In the afternoon, I bumped into Governor Tupay Loong in the lobby of the Hotel. He kindly and graciously invited me to have coffee and took the opportunity to present his views, particularly on the issue of territorial coverage of autonomy being the subject of GRP-MNLF negotiations. I recalled that the MNLF intelligence in Jolo had provided us with a copy of the report of the meeting of Sulu local officials with DND and military officials sometime in July 1994 where Governor Loong presented his views on the subject; now, I was hearing these facts directly from the governor. In effect, he was proposing that the MNLF accept a reduced number of provinces (from the thirteen listed in the Tripoli Agreement) to at least seven provinces where Muslims were in the majority. He requested that I brief the MNLF Chairman on this proposal and suggested more meetings.

*October 14.* At 10:10 AM, Chairman Misuari, who was then in the United Arab Emirates, phoned me, instructing me to prepare for the trip to New York to assist the MNLF Panel during the Special Consultation Meeting with the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General scheduled on October 24. I informed the MNLF Chairman of the scheduled trip of the GRP Panel to Tripoli Libya at the invitation of the Libyan Leader H.E. Muammar Khaddafy,<sup>97</sup> according to the information I gathered from Ambassador Rajab. The chairman said he was prepared to proceed to Tripoli if facilities for his travel could be arranged.

However, I was informed by Ambassador Rajab during a meeting on October 18 that Chairman Misuari would not reach Tripoli time for the meeting. this was not possible. Ambassador Yan and company were expected to reach Tripoli that for the meeting with the Libyan Leadership and would proceed to New York the following day. It

was decided that the MNLF Chairman could proceed to Tripoli at the end of October after the meeting in New York.

*October 19.* At 8:00 A.M., I had breakfast at Intercontinental Hotel with Mr. Donald Coleman of the U.S. Embassy<sup>98</sup> where I gave him briefing on the progress so far of the negotiations and handed to him the Note Verbale from the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference addressed to the US Consulate in Jeddah which I received from Jeddah by facsimile, requesting entry visa to the US for MNLF officials to attend special meeting with the OIC. Mr. Coleman was very helpful in facilitating the issuance of our entry visa to the US. The visa issued for Chairman Misuari, however, was marked with restriction within the Manhattan area only.

By 12 noon, I had lunch with Governor Loong at Annabelle's Restaurant in Quezon City. This time, Dr. Amin was with us. Governor Loong was very persistent about his proposal on the territorial coverage of the Autonomous Region for Muslims. He said what he was presenting was a "realistic formula" and that he had been going around discussing this idea and trying to convince other Muslim political leaders to support it. As soon as he achieved consensus, he assured us, he would present his proposal to GRP authorities. This seemed credible as I recalled that Governor Loong had accumulated much experience in local governance since the early 70s when he was appointed by then President Marcos as Mayor of the Municipality of Parang. He was elected Vice Governor of Sulu and succeeded to the position of Governor when the incumbent died of natural death in 1983. Most importantly, he was familiar with the thinking of the Mindanao leaders as well as the national leaders in Manila, having been in politics since the 70s.

*October 24.* The MNLF Delegation arrived in New York City. MNLF Chairman Misuari headed the delegation with Ustadz Abdulkaki Abubakar, Dr. Parouk Hussein, Sec. Gen. Muslimin Sema, Dr. Tham Manjoorsa, Rev. Absalom Cerveza and the Chairman of the MNLF Secretariat. A businessman from General Santos, Engr. Antanacio Vercide joined our trip in his private capacity. Also with us was Engr. Hadji Karun Yusop, a Muslim businessman who was on his way to San Francisco.<sup>99</sup>

The Special Meeting was held at the Indonesian Consulate and presided over by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas in his capacity

as Chairman of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six in the presence of the OIC Secretary General, Dr. Hamid Algabid. Dr. Hassan Wirajuda, Chairman of the GRP-OIC-MNLF Joint Secretariat and Mixed Committee was also in attendance together with the Head of the Indonesian Mission to the United Nations.<sup>100</sup>

During that meeting, Minister Alatas relayed the GRP Position particularly on the issue of Provisional Government. He said that no less than President Ramos, who had received him in Malacanang Palace with Members of the GRP Panel during his visit to Manila on September 7, explained to him the rationale of the latest GRP proposal to resolve the impasse over the issue of the Provisional Government. The same issue was also presented by the GRP Panel headed by Ambassador Yan whom he and the OIC Secretary General had a consultation meeting also in New York the previous day.<sup>101</sup>

Minister Alatas said that it was impressed upon him by the GRP Panel that, while it was admitted that the Tripoli Agreement should be implemented, its implementation should comply with Philippine constitutional requirements. He also said that the GRP Panel had intimated to him in that meeting that the territorial coverage of the autonomy may only be limited to areas where Muslims dominate – around six to seven provinces. The consensus points, considered more than 90 percent of the subject areas, could be reviewed and an agreement ironed out. As to the contentious issues on provisional government and the plebiscite, these were allowed to remain as they were; perhaps a breakthrough could be made before proceeding to Jakarta.<sup>102</sup>

The OIC Secretary General expressed his thanks to the MNLF delegation for coming to the meeting to present their position on this very important issue and reiterated the policy of the OIC to help resolve the Mindanao problem through a peaceful and negotiated settlement in accordance with the Tripoli Agreement within the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippine Government.

The MNLF Chairman then made a very candid response to the presentation of Minister Alatas. He invoked the unanimous decision reached by the MNLF leadership during its meeting held in Jolo in August. He reiterated the position that the Provisional Government be created without the need for plebiscite. He related how then President Marcos had implemented the Provisional Government by



issuing a Presidential Proclamation “in accordance with the Constitution of the GRP.” He said that Christian and Highlander leaders are united with the Muslims under the banner of the MNLF in support of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks.

The OIC Secretary General expressed his interest in coming up with a formula to guarantee enough security for the Muslims within the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippine Government. He reiterated the readiness of the OIC to work for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement in letter and spirit.

Minister Alatas made a follow-up of his statements, stating that he could see some difficulty in implementing the Tripoli Agreement because of the 1987 GRP Constitution, which he called an impediment. Stating that the Agreement should be implemented without violating the Constitution, he proposed to start with the Muslim dominated provinces and expand the area later on. “I am [playing] the Devil’s advocate,” Minister Alatas said.<sup>103</sup>

In response, the MNLF Chairman requested Rev. Cerveza to clarify certain issues. Rev. Cerveza, with his usual eloquence, argued that to agree with the GRP proposal for the MNLF to participate in the ARMM election and from there to expand the area later on was tantamount to localizing the Bangsamoro struggle. If this were to happen, the OIC would not be in a position to come in as it would appear as foreign interference in the local affairs of a sovereign state.

Minister Alatas countered by saying that this would not happen because the political arrangements would be made with the active participation of the OIC and would not be designed to take the OIC out of the picture.

The MNLF Chairman, in the end, reiterated the MNLF position and expressed the MNLF readiness to abide by the guidance and wisdom of the OIC.

After these exchanges of views and information in the spirit of mutual consultation, the parties, at the suggestion of Minister Alatas, agreed to schedule the Third Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta tentatively from November 29 to 30. Minister Alatas also informed the MNLF Delegation that President Suharto would be very happy to receive them at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel on October 25.

Earlier, the MNLF Chairman had also met separately with the

OIC Secretary General in the morning, and he thereafter met with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran.

*October 25: MNLF Meeting with President Suharto.* The MNLF Delegation, accompanied by Minister Alatas, met with President Suharto in the latter's Executive Suite at Waldorf Astoria Hotel. President Suharto spoke in Bahasa Indonesian with a senior aide acting as translator. During the meeting, which lasted more than an hour, he counseled the MNLF leaders on the wisdom of making an honorable and negotiated peace with the Philippine Government so that Indonesia could extend full support to improve the lives of the impoverished Filipino Muslims.

This top-level meeting of the MNLF leaders with the Head of the largest Muslim country in the world (in terms of population) and a close and friendly neighbor of the Philippines, was followed by high-level meetings with Ambassadors and Foreign Ministers of Muslims countries who were in New York attending the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations.<sup>104</sup>

The MNLF leaders and I also visited the Saudi Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in his office at the 56<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Chrysler Bldg., Lexington Avenue. He received us in his suite and expressed the support of his government as well as his personal commitment to the success of the Moro struggle through negotiations. He told us that President Ramos had met with Saudi Foreign Minister Muhammad Al-Faizal in Carthage, Columbia at the initiatives of President Ramos. The Philippine President also met with Indonesian President Suharto, the Foreign Ministers of Iran, Libya, Senegal and Somalia to explain the GRP position in the negotiations with the MNLF. In New York, however, the GRP officials failed to meet with Prince Sultan.

The MNLF Chairman also received invitations from Temple University, Berkeley University and Harvard University for speaking engagements but failed to go to these because his entry visa was restricted to the Manhattan area. However, he was able to receive delegations from the Muslim Association of America who expressed their support to the MNLF search for honorable peace.

While we were resting at the Saudi Consulate following up the issuance of entry visa to Saudi Arabia for the Chairman Misuari and Dr. Parouk Hussin, I took the opportunity to report to the MNLF

Chairman the proposal of Governor Loong on the territorial coverage of the proposed Autonomous Region. I told the Chairman Misuari of Governor Loong's formula so that he could review and consider it, and that if it was deemed acceptable, that Loong would spearhead the campaign to generate support within Mindanao and the national leadership. The MNLF Chairman's only comment was a sarcastic smile. Dr. Parouk Hussin and Ustadz Abdalbaki Abubakar were with us at this time, and the latter said, "tell Governor Loong, when we get back to the Philippines, that the MNLF will study his proposal for possible adoption in the negotiations with the GRP."<sup>105</sup>

### International Support for the Peace Talks.

Indeed, "international support continued to pour in", President Ramos would write later.<sup>106</sup>

Back in Manila, the national dailies carried the news of the support expressed by the international community to the GRP-MNLF Talks. The United States, through its Embassy in Manila, issued an official statement saying, "Resolving differences and securing peace in the Mindanao area are in the interest, not only of the people of the Philippines, but of the international community."<sup>107</sup> The 12-Nation European Union (EU), formerly the European Economic Community (EEC), in an official statement, also declared, "The European Union supports the efforts of President Fidel Ramos and his government to a find a peaceful, lasting and just solution for his country. It also commends Nur Misuari of the MNLF for his statesman-like stand for peace."<sup>108</sup>

The Japanese Embassy in Manila even sent the MNLF Secretariat Office, by facsimile, a copy of its official statement issued to the Press on November 14, which said, "Japan welcomes peace talks between Philippine Government and MNLF... Japan intends to examine how it can best provide maximum support to the rehabilitation and development of Mindanao."<sup>109</sup>

The stage was set for the resumption of the Formal Talks in Jakarta, thanks to the high-level consultations held in New York at the initiatives of Indonesia through the facilities of the OIC.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Pieter Damanik completed his tour of duty in Manila and left his post in October. His replacement was

Ambassador Abu Hartono who later played critical roles in the resolution of contentious issues that led to the signing of the Peace Agreement.

*November 7.* I met again with Governor Loong at Sulo Hotel, upon his request. I reported that I had presented his proposal to the MNLF Chairman, even describing to him the environment in which I made this presentation. I told him of the MNLF Leadership's intention to study his proposal for possible adoption in the negotiation with the GRP and briefed him on the results the MNLF trip to the US and our preparation for the Third Round of Formal Talks to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia by the end of the month. I assured him that his proposal would come in handy for the MNLF as the Peace Panel would tackle the issue of territorial coverage.

*November 8.* I had lunch with Mr. Coleman of the US Embassy and I briefed him on the results of the MNLF trip to the US to attend a special meeting with the OIC and the MNLF preparation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Round of Formal Talks to be held in Jakarta. I assured Mr. Coleman that the MNLF was optimistic that it would be able to hurdle the difficult issues in the talks.

*Back to Jakarta.* The Third Round of Formal Talks was held at Sari Pan Pacific Hotel, Jakarta, Indonesia, from November 27 to December 1, 1995.

The parties came in full force, reflective of the high expectations of the principal parties involved and the international community. The OIC Secretary General was represented by Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin. The Indonesian Delegation as Chair of the OIC Minister Committee of Six was headed by Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and seven other members with ten advisers from the Indonesian Government. Other members of the OIC Committee of Six were also present; representing Libyan Arab Jamahiriya were Ambassador Rajab and Ambassador Jerbi (Libyan Ambassador to Jakarta), representing Saudi Arabia was Ambassador Abdullah Abdulrahman Alim (Saudi Arabian Ambassador to Jakarta), and representing Bangladesh was Ambassador Abdul M. Choudory (Ambassador of Bangladesh to Jakarta).

Ambassador Manuel Yan headed the GRP Panel with three members (Rep. Ermita, ARMM Vice-Governor Nabil Tan, and Prof.

Rudy Rodil) and four advisers, twenty Support Committee members and their Chairmen and eleven members of the Secretariat.

MNLF Chairman Misuari headed the MNLF with sixty-one other members. Among them were four Christian leaders representing the provinces of Lanao Norte, Palawan, South Cotabato and North Cotabato. They had also with them Bangsamoro Women representatives headed by the wife of the MNLF Chairman, Hadja Ruaida (Eleonora) Tan Misuari, representatives from Non-Government Organizations, People's Organizations, one foreign consultant (from Jordan), three additional members of the Legal Panel, and five members of the Secretariat.

One additional feature in the Third Round of Formal Talks was the presence of representatives from the Philippine Peace Advocates in the person of Atty. Soliman M. Santos, Jr.<sup>110</sup>

In his speech at the opening ceremony, Minister Alatas underscored the fact that "a consensus has been reached on more than 80 percent of the issues...the Joint Ceasefire Committee has done a commendable job in promoting Confidence Building Measures...and maintaining the ceasefire...but the task before us has not become any less difficult for the less than 20 percent of the issues which remain unresolved are the most contentious and the ones that bear the greatest weight."<sup>111</sup>

Ambassador Yan recalled the achievements of the Panels in the last three years resulting in the resolution of more than 100 issues, the holding of intense diplomatic consultations between and among member states of the OIC Committee of Six, the grassroots consultations of the MNLF and the regional leadership summits conducted by the GRP. He cited the forging of "a great and enduring partnership for peace not only across the negotiating table, but across the greater Mindanao constituency and even beyond, the global peace network...The European Union, United States and Japan all have declared their unstinting support." Citing the dawning of peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina and earlier in the Middle East between Israel and the PLO, he declared, "Now, perhaps, it is the turn of Southeast Asia to shine in this quest. Mindanao is not only the front door to Philippine progress; it is the front door to regional peace and stability."<sup>112</sup>

.The MNLF Chairman, on the other hand, sounded prophetic in

his opening statements (now that we have the MILF and Abu Sayyaf problems in our hands). He said that the remaining “items are not that difficult to discuss and decide, unless we commit another mistake.” He was referring to what he called “half-baked and hypocritical solution” which would only give “false sense of security and hope” because it could not provide “sturdy foundations for our people’s future.” He continued, saying that if the credibility of the MNLF were compromised:

people would then seek realignment and raise the ante to a much higher political plane since our modest demand for autonomy would then appear crystal-clear before the eyes of the people as unworthy of their sacrifices and support....Ultimately, the MNLF...would either return to their original political objective, after autonomy should have been proven wrong, or else melt into those radical or extremist movements seeking complete decolonization...and the restoration of ...political freedom, sovereignty and independence.

He added that the:

MILF, Abu Sayyaf and the Islamic Command Council...are advocating decolonization, sovereignty and independence for Mindanao...the same idea the MNLF was fighting for until the OIC mediation came....Every time some people in the MNLF get dissatisfied, they leave the MNLF and either join other organizations or form new ones...such as in the case of the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf....And worst still would the situation be should the MNLF commit another blunder of conceding further...It may throw the whole region into a chaotic and anarchic situation, where only the extremists...would gain.

He also cited over fifty major ceasefire violations committed by the AFP, which have remained unresolved, saying, “Honestly, we feel greatly disadvantaged by the Interim Ceasefire Agreement.” He mentioned the pronouncements from the AFP as recently carried in the papers and the AFP troop movements reported to him by MNLF commanders in the ground. “The AFP forces are saturating every part of the Bangsamoro Homeland and preparing for war...unlike the Bangsamoro Armed Forces, which do nothing except stay in their camps and prepare for peace and eventual integration into the AFP....The government of President Ramos should not succumb to them,” he emphasized...if he can muster his power and his wisdom to bring about the final triumph of peace over war, then he should be immortalized in history for his good deeds to the people and humanity.... Therefore, everyone should urge President Ramos and

his Government not to fail in their duty to restore peace to the region...just as he (Ramos) said Think Peace, Speak Peace, Act Peace and Achieve Peace.”<sup>113</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin, speaking on behalf of the OIC Secretary General, announced that “the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers will be convened in Guinea, Conakry from 9 to 13 December 1995. They nurture hopes that both parties will seize this opportunity to...make peace. The OIC believed that, provided there is a genuine goodwill and keen desire to achieve a just and lasting peace...all the obstacle, be they legal, technical...can never form a stumbling block that could impede the attainment of creative and practical solution to any issue we may have before us.”<sup>114</sup>

Ambassador Wiryono,<sup>115</sup> someone “who has been involved in the Formal Talks from the very beginning” (as Minister Alatas proudly announced in the Opening Ceremony) resumed the position of Facilitator-Chairman of the Plenary Session. He informed the body that as he had suggested to Ambassador Yan and Chairman Misuari, the meeting would proceed from less difficult issues to more difficult ones. “The first duty is to consolidate all the results thus far in the Support Committee and the Mixed Committee into an Interim Agreement. The second duty is to settle the more contentious problem regarding the implementing structure and mechanism (Provisional Government) in keeping with the Tripoli Agreement. The third duty is to discuss the situation on the ground, and to discuss some of the difficulties of implementing the task of the JCC and how to improve the mobility of the observers.”<sup>116</sup>

Chairman Misuari agreed with the suggestions of Ambassador Wiryono but suggested that the agenda of drafting a response to the statements of support issued by the United States, European Union and Japan be included. Ambassador Yan expressed his agreement and presented to the body the statement of President Ramos regarding the support of the international community.

Misuari also suggested that the body proceed first with the discussion of the situation on the ground so that issues on alleged ceasefire violations could be cleared. The suggestion was carried.<sup>117</sup>

After Brig. Gen. Kivlan Zen<sup>118</sup> and Ambassador Hartono presented their respective reports, Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chairman of the MNLF-JCC was requested to also present his report. He said, “90%

of the ceasefire violations remained unresolved.” After describing specific situations, he suggested “the need to advise SOUTHCOM<sup>119</sup> that any assistance requested by the JCC should be granted immediately to ensure expeditious completion of its work.”<sup>120</sup>

Yan also requested Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman of the GRP-JCC to present his report. Gen. Ruiz did so, concluding his report by saying that “most of the violations that were allegedly committed by the GRP were because of non-confirmation of MNLF areas...and that the presence of AFP troops in these areas was because there were other armed groups who want to sabotage the peace process such as the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf”<sup>121</sup>

Damanik, as a former Chairman of the JCC meetings until 1995, was also called to share his experience. He cited the experience of Indonesia during the struggle for independence...the problem on ceasefire violations was due to unclear demarcation lines...in the GRP-MNLF case, it is about MNLF areas which were not cleared with the GRP...also the OIC Observers must be properly equipped.”<sup>122</sup>

On the matter of AFP troop movements in certain parts of Mindanao, which became the concern of the MNLF, then DILG Undersecretary Aguirre replied by saying:

The GRP has a sovereign duty to its people and to protect the territorial integrity of the county. It is not only the MNLF forces that are armed, but also the MILF, Abu Sayyaf and the Islamic Command Council. If there are troop movements or deployments in Mindanao, it is because it is necessary to protect law and order, internal security and protect the citizens in the areas; otherwise there will be chaos and then there will be no capability of the GRP to at least protect its citizens. In this environment, the GRP can talk to its MNLF brothers more effectively. Statements of high-ranking government officials were directed towards the MILF who were gaining strength. The Secretary of Defense had to make a statement to warn MILF forces not to make any threatening moves that will disrupt the on-going talks in Jakarta. The statements were not directed towards the MNLF. When the Tripoli Agreement was reached, the MNLF was the only force recognized by the OIC. The situation now is different with the existence of other armed forces, which are not recognized by the OIC.<sup>123</sup>

Ermita supported the statements of Aguirre by saying, “it was not the intention of the high ranking government officials to contradict the President’s peace agenda.”<sup>124</sup>

On the issue of the integration of the MNLF forces with the AFP (one of the most contentious issues), Misuari said, “If the MNLF is



to be integrated, it must be integrated fully...otherwise, the MNLF would just wish to stay away from the AFP and do not wish to be integrated anymore.”<sup>125</sup> Then he read out an MNLF statement, which said in part:

In view of the GRP Panel's insistence on its formula of the MNLF integration into the AFP, which the MNLF finds unacceptable, as it is unfair and unrealistic, the MNLF Panel submits the following proposition for deliberation:

- That the MNLF no longer pursue the causes of integration of its armed forces into the AFP;
- That the MNLF shall confine itself to internal regional security;
- That the AFP should withdraw its forces from the areas of autonomy, though the AFP may maintain a token force;
- That only in cases of emergency will the AFP be allowed to come into the region upon the invitation of the Autonomous Government...

The Chairman, Ambassador Wiryono, hesitated for the reason that “the proposition appeared to be inconsistent with the Tripoli Agreement (Article 2): *The National Defense Affairs shall be the concern of the Central Authority provided that the arrangements for the joining of the forces of the MNLF with the Philippines Armed Forces be discussed later*’.” He then stressed that while Prof. Misuari intended to simplify the matter, he was actually complicating it as it was not consistent with the Tripoli Agreement and that he was “going to have difficulties in proceeding further because the Tripoli Agreement would cease to be the full basis of the talks.”<sup>126</sup>

Misuari replied that it did not occur to him and his party that it would affect the integrity of the Tripoli Agreement and requested a ten-minute recess.<sup>127</sup>

Ambassador Rajab requested the floor to urge the two sides to try to bridge the gap, reminding them that they have been in the negotiations for three years and had been very patient. He said that the parties should be creative and bold enough to overcome these challenges, which was the very the purpose of the meeting.<sup>128</sup>

After consulting the MNLF Panel, Misuari came back to announce the withdrawal of the proposals as contained in that statement. He

acknowledged Ambassador Wiryono's concern of the consequence of such move, stating that it was never his intention to jeopardize the integrity of the Tripoli Agreement. He expressed his wish that he not be known for such a precipitous act as discarding in part or whole the Tripoli Agreement since the future of his people evolved around the Agreement.<sup>129</sup>

Another contentious issue was about the area of autonomy. The Tripoli Agreement defined the area of Autonomy as consisting of thirteen provinces (now fourteen plus Sarangani, formerly part of South Cotabato). The discussion expanded to the issue about the ARMM. There was a suggestion to move the date by another six months from March to September 1996. Ambassador Yan also reiterated the GRP offer for Chairman Misuari to participate in the ARMM election. He said, "if the MNLF wins...the GRP will pass an 'accession' bill for any predominantly Muslim Province will join the present ARMM by holding a plebiscite....Once the Chairman is elected, he will have the opportunity to demonstrate his capacity for governance."<sup>130</sup>

In between sessions, the MNLF Panel would hold caucuses to discuss the issue about the area of autonomy with a map laid down on the table for guidance. On one occasion, Ambassador Wiryono joined the caucus and shared his opinion. One member of the MNLF Panel commented that the views presented hewed very closely to the GRP position. The MNLF also gave Ambassador Wiryono their views on the matter, hoping that the idea would reach the GRP Panel.

After five days of intensive discussions, caucuses and plenary sessions, the Formal Talks ended on December 1 with the signing of the 1995 Interim Agreement containing 123 points of consensus under the five areas covered by the Support Committees. These points covered almost all the outstanding issues in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. Included in these points of consensus were seven points of agreement on the Structure of the Provisional Government.

By virtue of these accomplishments, the consensus of the participants that the "contours of the final peace agreement are irreversibly taking shape" as mandated by the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1993 Cipanas Statement of Understanding was expressed. Also expressed was the idea that the final agreement was expected to be achieved in the fourth and last round of the Formal Peace Talks...<sup>131</sup>

However, there were still issues that remained unresolved: Revenue sharing and the joining of the MNLF forces with the AFP and the setting up of Special Regional Security Forces in the area of autonomy.

*Manila, December 13.* Back in Manila, and as MNLF Spokesman, I issued the following MNLF Statement to the Manila Press at the same Ciudad Fernandina Forum as follows:

The Third Round of Formal Talks between the MNLF and the GRP with the active participation of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six chaired by Indonesia and the OIC Secretary General was held on November 27—December 1, 1995 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The plenary sessions were presided over by Ambassador S. Wiryono, representing the Chairman of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six, with Prof. Nur Misuari heading the MNLF Peace Panel and Ambassador Manuel Yan as Chairman of the GRP Peace Panel.

At the end of the 5-day meetings, the MNLF and the GRP Panels, with the participation of the OIC Committee of the Six represented by Indonesia and the OIC Secretary General represented by Ambassador Mohamad Mohsin, OIC Deputy Secretary General, signed an agreement known as the 1995 Interim Agreement which is a consolidation of all consensus points on the subject of Education, Economic and Financial System, Judiciary and Introduction to Shariah, Administrative System, Legislative Assembly, Executive Council and Representation in National Government, National Defense and Regional Security Force, and on the Implementing Structure and Mechanism. Both parties acknowledged that about 98 percent of the agenda of the peace talks have been achieved. The remaining “contentious” issues are on the modalities of the Implementing Structure and Mechanism of the Provisional Government and on the formula for the integration of the MNLF Forces into the AFP and PNP.

Both Panels took note that the remaining issues require wider consultation and study in order to find an innovative and creative formula in overcoming the remaining issues. The GRP Panel has committed to “search every nook and cranny of the Constitutional Universe” in order to look for the creative and imaginative approach to the contentious issues. For its part, the MNLF has started that it is ready to summon the required moral courage in overcoming the thorny road to lasting peace in Mindanao and its islands.

After the signing of the 1995 Interim Agreement, MNLF Chairman Misuari expressed the optimism of his delegation on the success of the peace efforts, saying that the future of Mindanao nay the Philippines looks very, very bright. He repeated that the MNLF has been giving peace maximum chance to be achieved in the Southern Philippines.

Chairman Misuari, acknowledging the statements of support behind the

peace process issued by the US Government, the European Union and the Japanese Government, stated that the restoration of peace in Mindanao will certainly mean political stability and economic prosperity in the whole of the Philippines and in the region of Southeast Asia as well. Thus, the MNLF is confident that both Panels should be able to demonstrate the needed wisdom and statesmanship in overcoming the remaining so-called contentious issues which actually are not substantive but mere procedural issues.

Chairman Misuari also expressed appreciation for the statement of support behind the cause of peace issued by various sectors in Mindanao notably Governor Vicente Emano of Misamis, Gov. Habib Tupay Loong of Sulu, Governor Gerry Matba of Tawi-Tawi, Governor Gerry Salapuddin of Basilan, Mayor Rodrigo Duterte of Davao City, Mayor Rosalita Nunez of General Santos City, Vice Governor Normallah Alonto Lucman of Lanao del Sur, the Ulama Council of the Philippines headed by Governor Mahid Mutilan of Lanao del Sur, the Council of Muslim Leaders in Davao City, former Governor Louie Alano of Basilan, former Mayor Allan Flores of Iligan City and representatives of the Highlanders (Lumads).

The MNLF is now in the thick of consultation in preparation for the holding of the Fourth Round of Talks. Consultations will be made with various sectors of Mindanao and its islands, and also with international groups and organizations who have expressed concern in the peaceful resolution of the age-conflict in the South.

Chairman Misuari has instructed all MNLF forces to stay in their respective camps and places and observe the terms of the Ceasefire Agreement with the GRP while other MNLF leaders have been instructed to continue the consultations not only among themselves but more so with the cross – sections of the people in Mindanao and its islands.

One of the directives of the MNLF Chairman to the MNLF leaders and Bangsamoro Armed Forces is the preparation for a life of peace and their readiness to share the burden in the tasks of reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war-torn areas of the Southern Philippines.

But it is unfortunate that while the MNLF is spearheading the consolidation of all efforts for the peaceful and honorable resolution of the conflict, other sectors have been bombarding the nation with warnings of full scale war and concocting anti-people, anti-peace scenarios in support of their diabolical plans of massive militarization of Mindanao and its islands. Time and again, the MNLF has declared that “war is a form of savagery”, “war is barbaric”. The MNLF maintains that the time for reconstruction, the time for rehabilitation and the time for peace has already come. And this peace must be genuine and durable, not farcical, temporary or hypocritical.

On the issue of the postponement of the March 1996 ARMM election, I said, that it would “give both panels the chance to come up with creative solutions...but the talks should not be extended unnecessarily because the longer the talks, the more [these] will become vulnerable to possible sabotage.”<sup>132</sup>

In the meantime, Chairman Misuari led the MNLF Delegation to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held in Conakry, Guinea, Africa from 9 to 13 December 1995. The OIC issued a resolution welcoming and supporting the GRP-MNLF Talks.

The year 1995 ended with all parties looking forward to the last and final round of talks in Jakarta, Indonesia.

## Endnotes, Chapter 5

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<sup>1</sup> Press Statement issued by Sec. Manuel T. Yan, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Chairman, Philippine Panel, GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, January 2, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Letter of H.E. Ambassador Pieter Damanik, Indonesian Embassy, to H.E. Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, GRP Panel Chairman and H. E. Nur Misuari, MNLF Panel Chairman, dated January 9, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of Ambassador Damanik to MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari dated January 21, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> MNLF Secretariat Letter to Ambassador Damanik dated January 21, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Letters of Ambassador Damanik to the GRP and MNLF Panels both dated January 21, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Letter of MNLF Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chairman, MNLF-JCC to Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman, and GRP-JCC dated February 4, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Abdurahim Aradais, Chairman, MNLF Sulu Provincial Ceasefire Committee, Report to MNLF Chairman dtd 25 February 1995. MNLF Secretariat File.

<sup>10</sup> Talib Congo, MNLF State Chairman, Basilan, Report to Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, MNLF Ceasefire Committee Chairman dtd February 15, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> MGen Abdul Sahrin, Chairman, MNLF Joint Ceasefire Committee, Letter to Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman, GRP Joint Ceasefire Committee, dtd 24 February 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Letter of Libyan Ambassador to Manila, H. Rajab A. Azzarouq to MNLF Chairman Misuari

dated March 15, 1996.

- <sup>13</sup> Abeth Iribani, Chairman, MNLF Secretariat, Handwritten Note to Ambassador Yan, Chairman, GRP Panel and Ambassador Damanik, of Indonesian Embassy, dtd March 6, 1995 sent by wire from Jolo.
- <sup>14</sup> Abeth Iribani, Chairman, MNLF Secretariat, Report to MNLF Chairman dtd March 26, 1995 sent to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia by facsimile. MNLF Secretariat File.
- <sup>16</sup> Letter of Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman, GRP-JCC to MNLF Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chairman, MNLF-JCC dated 04 April 1995.
- <sup>17</sup> MNLF Secretariat file.
- <sup>19</sup> MNLF Secretariat Letter to Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman, GRP Panel, dated April 19, 1995.
- <sup>20</sup> Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, letter to MNLF Chairman Misuari through the MNLF Secretariat dated 20 April 1995.
- <sup>21</sup> See also Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p.64.
- <sup>22</sup> Alvarez Isnaji is a prominent MNLF Leader from Sulu. He was elected to the ARMM Regional Legislative Assembly in the 1996 election and is still serving his term up to now.
- <sup>23</sup> James P. Saspa, "Another Demolition Job?" in the Philippine Free Press, January 27, 1996.
- <sup>24</sup> Khaddafy is the younger brother of Abdurajak Janjalani, The elder Janjalani was believed to be the founder of the Abu Sayyaf. He died in an encounter with the PNP in December 1998. The younger Janjalani assumed leadership of the Abu Sayyaf and headed the Abu Sayyaf Group that kidnapped about 53 school children and teachers in Basilan in March this year. He and the remaining members of his group are now believed to be on the run in Basilan against pursuing Army troops.
- <sup>25</sup> Situational Report on Ipil Incident (Type written) submitted by an unnamed MNLF Intelligence in the ground as reported by a certain Hussien, a loyal and runner of Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalani, founder and leader of the Abu Sayyaf, which the MNLF Secretariat dispatch to the MNLF Chairman in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia dtd April 23, 1995. (MNLF Secretariat File).
- <sup>26</sup> Abeth Iribani, Chairman, MNLF Secretariat, Confidential Report to MNLF Chairman dtd May 12, 1995 sent by facsimile to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. MNLF Secretariat file.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Abet Iribani, Chairman MNLF Secretariat, telephone conversation with MNLF Chairman Misuari on the night of May 23, 1995.
- <sup>29</sup> Lt. Gen. Yusop Jikiri, Chief of Staff, Bangsamoro Armed Forces, Press Statement issued to the media dtd 27 May 1995.
- <sup>30</sup> Vic Alvarez, "28 Sayyaf hostages executed," *The Manila Times*, May 29, 1995.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> MNLF Secretariat letter to Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman, GRP-JCC dtd May 25, 1995.
- <sup>33</sup> MNLF Secretariat Letters to Libyan Ambassador Rajab Azzarouq and Indonesian Ambassador Pieter Damanik both dated May 26, 1995.

- <sup>34</sup> MNLF Secretariat Letter to Ambassador Yan dtd May 29, 1995.
- <sup>35</sup> Aresti Tanglao, "7 soldiers die in clash with MILF, "Malaya, June 7, 1995.
- <sup>36</sup> MNLF Secretariat, Report to Support Committee No. 1 (Defense) headed by Dr. Tham Manjoorsa dtd June 6, 1995.
- <sup>37</sup> MNLF Secretariat Letter to Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz, Chairman, GRP-JCC dtd June 6, 1995.
- <sup>38</sup> MNLF Secretariat Letter to Ambassador Yan dtd June 7, 1995.
- <sup>39</sup> MNLF Secretariat Report to Dr. Abdurahman Amin, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, June 10, 1995.
- <sup>40</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Basilan Joint Ceasefire Committee dtd June 8, 1995. MNLF Secretariat file
- <sup>41</sup> Dr. Hassan Wirajuda, "Opening Statements", 5th Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City, June 19, 1995.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid
- <sup>44</sup> Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, Chairman, GRP Panel, "Opening Statements," 5th Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City, June 19,1995.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> H.E. Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin, Representative of the OIC Secretary General to the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks, "Opening Statements", 5th Mixed Committee Meeting, June 19, 1995, Davao City.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, "Opening Statements," 5th Mixed Committee Meeting, June 19, 1995, Davao City.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the GRP-MNLF 5th Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City, June 19-23, 1995 (Prepared by the MNLF Secretariat), Para 10.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid, Para 11.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, Para 9.
- <sup>55</sup> When Executive Secretary Torres assumed office in early 1995, Congressman Ermita asked this writer confirmation of the close relationship between Torres and Misuari during their college days in the University of the Philippines. He told Ermita that he had no details on that but the MNLF Chairman had one time asked him about then Labor Secretary Torres who came to Saudi Arabia in 1991 at the height of the Gulf War to attend to the needs of Overseas Filipino Workers there. Secretary Torres tried to contact Chairman Misuari but the latter was in another Middle East country. This writer told Congressman Ermita that from the way the MNLF Chairman talked about Secretary Torres, the two men must be

very close during their university days.

<sup>56</sup> See also Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 67.

<sup>57</sup> Assistant Secretary Jovenal Lazaga from then on became this writer's direct link to Executive Secretary Ruben Torres. The two men worked very closely together until the signing of the Peace Agreement in September 1996. Lazaga also invited this writer with instructions from then President Ramos and Secretary Torres to assume as Executive Director of the President's Education for Peace Program (PEPP) under the Office of the Executive Secretary, which we organized in January 1997. This writer stayed in that office until December 1997.

<sup>58</sup> Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the 5th Mixed Committee Meeting... Para 38.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, Para 37.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, Para 77 and 78.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, Para 78 and 79.

<sup>62</sup> Hon. Ali Sangki, elected Board Member of Maguindao, Jimmy Tayuan, a businessman, Hadji Israel Abdullah and Taps Umal, both from the Office on Muslim Affairs.

<sup>63</sup> Ramos, "Break Not the Peace..." pp. 64-65.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> The two Muslim leaders, Pundato and Camlian were together with Chairman Misuari when they founded the MNLF. Their group became known as the Top 90 (90 Young Muslims who originally went on a foreign military training and organized the MNLF in 1969).

<sup>68</sup> Manila Bulletin, July 13, 1995.

<sup>69</sup> MNLF Press Statement issued by the MNLF Secretariat, July 9, 1995

<sup>70</sup> During the First Philippine Muslim Visioning Conference held July 8-10, 1994, Speaker De Venecia raised the need to prepare a comprehensive plan for Muslim Mindanao. At the end of 1995, the United Muslim Democratic Party Development Foundation, an associate of the LAKAS-NUCD Party of President Ramos and Speaker De Venecia, came up with what they called 'Ramos-De Venecia Plan' a Marshall-type economic development and rehabilitation plan for selected Muslim Provinces in Mindanao.

<sup>71</sup> MNLF Secretariat, Aide Memoire for the MNLF Chairman dtd July 21, 1995.

<sup>72</sup> Governor Pangandaman was a member of the GRP Panel that negotiated with the MNLF in Tripoli, Libya in 1976. He won the 1993 ARMM election due to the all-out support of the Ramos Administration Party.

<sup>73</sup> Report of the Chairman of the 6th Mixed Committee Meeting, General Santos City, July 26-28, 1995. MNLF Secretariat File.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, pp. 22-23

<sup>76</sup> Points of Consensus, 6th Mixed Committee Meeting, General Santos City, July 26-28, 1995.



<sup>77</sup> Transcript of the Proceedings... p.6.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Brig. Gen. Alfatah Abubakar is from Maguindanao. He served as Vice Chairman of MNLF Northern Mindanao Command and Vice Chairman of MNLF-JCC. He is now Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology in the ARMM.

<sup>81</sup> Ustadz Murshi Ibrahim is from Sulu. He is a High School classmate of this writer. He completed his Islamic Studies at the Mindanao State University and a Higher Course in Qur'anic Science at the Imam Bin Saudi University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He became the MNLF Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs and in 1996 was appointed by Governor Misuari as his Chief of Staff in the ARMM until 1999.

<sup>82</sup> Sarang Bangun is the revolutionary name of Desdemona Abubakar Tan, the first wife of Chairman Misuari who died and is buried in Islamabad, Pakistan in July 1987. A charitable foundation, Sarang Bangun Foundation is named after her to honor her contribution to the Bangsamoro Struggle. The Foundation received a special grant from the Islamic Development Bank, the proceeds of which were used to finance the construction of the building and run an orphanage school.

<sup>83</sup> The Holy Qur'an says "...and those who respond to the call of their Sustainer and are constant in prayer, and whose rule (in all matters of common concern) is consultation among themselves and who spend out of what we provide for them..." (As-Shura: 38). The principle of Shura is to be applied at all levels of social interactions. The family, the smallest unit of social structure, is also asked to practice shura before deciding upon important issues...According to many commentators, shura was obligatory even for the Prophet himself. (Mumtaz Ahmad (ed), "State Politics and Islam", American Trust Publications, Washington, D.C., 1986) p. 76.

<sup>84</sup> Ariel Digma, "Indonesia reaffirms support for RP-MNLF talks", Malaya, September 9, 1995.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ramos, "Break Not the Peace..." p.69.

<sup>88</sup> Carolyn O. Arguillas, "Budget hearing time once more", Philippine Daily Inquirer, September 4, 1995.

<sup>89</sup> Commander Rizal Jilhano is from Sulu. He was then Deputy Chief of the Bangsamoro Army with their Camp in Matanog. He is now the Administrator of Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA)-ARMM under Governor Misuari.

<sup>90</sup> Letter of Ambassador Damanik to Brig. Gen. Ruiz, Chairman, GRP-JCC, Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chairman MNLF-JCC and Brig. Gen. Asmardi Arbi, Commander, OIC Observer Team dated September 13, 1995.

<sup>92</sup> Roseten Tugaff, "MNLF sees progress in 3rd Round of Talks," The Manila Chronicle, September 28, 1995.

<sup>93</sup> Press Release issued by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations, New York, N.Y., USA (No. 03/PR-NY/95).

<sup>94</sup> Aijas Ahmad, *Class and Colony in Mindanao*, New York, 1980. Reprinted by the Moro Kurier.

<sup>96</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Diary, 1995. Satur Ocampo was elected later as Sectoral Representative of Bayan Muna in the House of Representatives until 2005.

- <sup>97</sup> Ramos revealed later in his book, (*Break Not the Peace...* p. 70-71) that the Libyan Leader replied to the aide memoire he sent earlier and invited the Government to send a special envoy to Libya to discuss the progress of the negotiations. The team sent by President Ramos on October 16 consisted of Ambassador Yan, Congressman Ermita, Congressman Jaafar and Mr. Afafe.
- <sup>98</sup> I have been meeting almost on a monthly basis with US Embassy officials, at their initiatives since my meeting with Mr. Naim Ahmad, First Secretary, Political Section of the US Embassy in October 1993. US Embassy officials have shown interest on the progress of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks.
- <sup>99</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Notes, MNLF Trip to USA, October 1995.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup> The MNLF was also aware of the diplomatic efforts conducted by the GRP as President Ramos revealed later on in his book (*Break not the Peace...*), that he "took every occasion to seek out either the Heads of State or Foreign Ministers of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six...to broaden the diplomatic consensus over our Constitutional solution to the issues laid on the negotiating table." p. 72.
- <sup>105</sup> Abet Iribani, Personal Diary, 1995.
- <sup>107</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, November 14, 1995.
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid, *The Manila Times*, November 19, 1995.
- <sup>109</sup> Press Release issued by the Embassy of Japan, Manila dated November 14, 1995. It also appeared in *The Manila Times*, November 19, 1995. Also cited in the book of President Ramos (*Break Not the Peace...*) p. 73
- <sup>110</sup> Atty. Santos was the author of the "Legal Note" presented by the MNLF Chairman in the First Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta in October 1993. From then on, Atty. Santos sent unsolicited advice and opinions on the legal aspects of the issue taken up in the negotiations. The MNLF Chairman had even the confidence to invite him to MNLF caucus during breaks in the sessions. The legal opinions he gave encouraged the MNLF Panel to open their minds to possible legal options to resolve the impasse on the issue of the Provisional Government.
- <sup>111</sup> H.E. Ali Alatas, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, "Opening Statements", Third Round of GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, Jakarta, November 27, 1995.
- <sup>113</sup> MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, "Opening Statements," Third Round of GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, Jakarta, November 27, 1995.
- <sup>114</sup> Ambassador Muhammad Mohsin, Representative of the OIC Secretary General, "Opening Statement," Third Round of GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, Jakarta, November 27, 1995.
- <sup>115</sup> Ambassador Wiryo was by now the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia. He served as the Facilitator-Chairman of the previous two Formal Talks.
- <sup>116</sup> Executive Summary of the Proceedings of the Third Formal Peace Talks Between the GRP and the MNLF with the participation of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six and the OIC Secretary General, Jakarta, 27 November – 1 December 1995. Para 9 (Hereinafter referred to as the Executive Summary of the Third Formal Talks).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, Para 44.

<sup>118</sup> Brig. Gen. Kivlan Zen is from the Indonesian Armed Forces and is the new Commander of the OIC Observer Team replacing Brig. Gen. Asmardi Arbi who completed his tour of duty with satisfactory rating. Gen. Arbi is now the Head of the Indonesian Consulate in Davao City.

<sup>119</sup> SOUTHCOM is the AFP's Southern Command based in Zamboanga City.

<sup>120</sup> Executive Summary, Third Formal Talks...Para 49.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, Para 51 and 54.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, Para 62.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, Para 67.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, Para 214.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, Para 215.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, Para 216 and 218.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, Para 219.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, Para 223.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, Para 378.

<sup>131</sup> Joint Press Communiqué issued by the Third Round of Formal Talks between the GRP and the MNLF with the participation of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six and the OIC Secretary General, Jakarta, December 1, 1995.

<sup>132</sup> Dennis Gorecho, "Moro Rebels want ARMM polls reset for peace talks," *TODAY*, December 14, 1995.





## 1996: Moment of Truth



Congressman Eduardo Ermita visited  
MMF chairman Misuari, accompanied  
by Akel Tirkani, MMF spokesman, at  
Camp Khaled Ibn Walid, Timbunjan,  
Jolo, Sulu in December 20, 1993  
prior to the Mixed Committee Meeting  
in the presence of the OTC.

*Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And None is like Him.*  
—Qur'an: 112

The year began on a positive note. I had the opportunity to meet Sister Teresa Joseph Constantino of the Carmel of St. Therese of the Child of Jesus. This meeting was arranged by former Ambassador Alejandro Melchor, Jr. and took place in the Carmelite Convent in Quezon City. With them were Ambassador Rajab, Atty. Soliman Santos Jr., and Mrs. Ruaida (Eleonora) Tan Misuari.

In that meeting, Sister Teresa shared her impression of the MNLF Chairman, which she had earlier told President Ramos. If what Chairman Misuari said was true, she told the President, that he just would like to go back to the University of the Philippines after the Peace Talks is ended with a settlement, then the man must really be sincere. She told the President of the need to put up Special Economic Zones in Mindanao particularly in the depressed areas. She also suggested that President Ramos could meet with Chairman Misuari just as President Aquino did ten years ago (1986).

"The President," she observed, "was open to this idea." She even suggested that they could meet in the convent. (President Aquino and Chairman Misuari had also met in a Carmelite Convent in Jolo.) "We need to put up cooperatives so that people can come together and earn a living," she said. She offered the services of the seven Carmelite Monasteries in Mindanao. "They can help," she said, "in the Peace Process through prayer meetings." She volunteered to organize a force for prayers to pray for peace.

Ambassador Rajab related his firsthand experience and observation of the situation in Muslim areas during the negotiations for the release of the two Spanish nuns kidnapped in Jolo in 1993. He saw widespread poverty in the area and saw that people had the natural tendency to engage in violent acts under this kind of environment. Rajab said:

Poverty is the core of the problem. Our involvement led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement. [But] it has been 20 years since then and many things have happened. That is why we believe that the best time to consolidate peace is now—during the administration of President Ramos

(for the GRP) and under the leadership of Chairman Misuari (for the MNLF and the Bangsamoro). We do not see much hope after this [opportunity]. A good economic development plan is very important in the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. Agreement can be implemented, contrary to the opinion of some people. It is an international agreement. In the present talks, the parties have reached substantial points of consensus already on almost all issues. What is needed now is a dramatic gesture like a one-on-one meeting between the President and Chairman Misuari. Then we can start thinking of programs that could sustain the agreement.

It is very important that the agreement is realistic and sustainable. We will have a big problem in our hands if the talks will not succeed. Our country's involvement in the Mindanao conflict stems mainly from two main issues: the concept of the Muslim *Ummah*, Muslim Community, and Muslim Solidarity. The Muslims all over the world are one. It is the duty of a Muslim individual or a country to help another Muslim in times of distress. The second one is our country's respect for human rights. We are doing this through the Office of the Organization of Islamic Conference.

Former Ambassador Melchor, on the other hand, recounted his involvement in the MNLF-GRP negotiations in 1975:

The situation then was different. It was Martial Law and the military was in full control. The negotiations could not really have succeeded. Besides, the OIC officials then were entertaining a very dangerous idea as a formula for peace in Mindanao. The Government then could not accept it but finally settled on the formula of autonomy as now embodied in the Tripoli Agreement. We came up then with the plan, 'Rehabilitation and Development for Mindanao.' This time, we can also do the same, come up with an economic plan. The Amanah Bank (now Islamic Bank of the Philippines) can play an important role here. This Bank was precisely created to help accelerate the economic and social development in these depressed Muslim areas. We can make use of the Bank as the conduit of funds for development. Sister Teresa is a very credible person to the President. She can tell or ask the President about sensitive issues, which no one else can do. This idea of the MNLF Chairman coming to Manila should really be pushed for. Christianity should always be guided by what Pope John Paul VI said of governments: *a nation is judged by how it treats its ethnic minority*.

Mrs. Ruaida (Eleonora Tan) Misuari expressed elation over this meeting and gave assurance that the MNLF Chairman was really serious in making peace with the government. She and Sister Teresa were friends during their UP days. She said she would inform the MNLF Chairman about this meeting.



Executive Secretary Ruben Torres confirmed the meeting between Sister Teresa and President Ramos. He was also instructed by the President to meet with Sister Teresa. (He was supposed to join that meeting in the Convent but failed to do so because of some official commitments). He requested me to relay the information to the Chairman and the MNLF that the President had just signed the bill passed by Congress to postpone the election in the ARMM to September 1996. He sent a personal letter to Chairman Misuari through me to inform the Chairman about all these developments.

All these were sincere words from credible persons: a devout servant of God like Sister Teresa who had no other motive than to help seek peace; a realistic assessment from a seasoned Arab diplomat who represented a country that persuaded the once radical MNLF to agree on autonomy and was now relentlessly pursuing the same theme in the ongoing talks; a former Executive Secretary (of President Marcos), a former Philippine Ambassador to Russia, and a devout Catholic who had a soft heart for the Muslims because of his long exposure to Muslim affairs that dated back to the Kamlon uprising in Sulu;<sup>1</sup> a long-time colleague of Chairman Misuari in the Muslim struggle who was now his wife; and a college buddy of Misuari in his UP days who was now the “Little President” committed to help his friend achieve peace in Mindanao. These were people who had direct access to both Chairman Misuari and President Ramos and all of them shared the same idea of pursuing the peace process to a successful end.

But despite those reassuring words of peace and the positive results of the Third Round of Formal Talks, the New Year seemed to have begun with some difficulties as the parties prepared to tackle the most contentious issues. Even the GRP Panel felt that “we were headed for an impasse.”<sup>2</sup> To the GRP Panel, it was now time to “consult the people”. To them, “there was nothing more important than to seek broader and deeper consultations with the people, especially through local officials.”<sup>3</sup> The GRP Panel went into a series of consultations with various sectors of society “to take advantage of the momentum of goodwill generated by the Third Round of Formal Talks.”<sup>4</sup> One such consultation was the Peace and Order Summit scheduled in Zamboanga City on 26-27 February, which was then planned to be attended by no less than President Ramos.

## Popular Consultations

It was agreed in the last Formal Talks that the GRP Panel would convene a “Popular Consultation” to be attended by local executives of the area and the MNLF Chairman would be invited. On the one hand, this would give him the opportunity to present his programs for peace to the local officials. On the other hand, the local executives would be given the chance (as they had been clamoring for it) to air their concerns directly with the MNLF.

In a letter dated January 26, addressed to both Chairmen of GRP and MNLF Panels, the Indonesian Ambassador relayed “the importance [of convening] the Mixed Committee Meeting” and suggested February 29-March 1 as the date for it. In a subsequent letter also addressed to both Panel Chairmen dated February 2, he further suggested that the MNLF could attend the Popular Consultation after the local officials would have met with the President on February 29, and the Mixed Committee Meeting would follow afterwards in the same venue of Zamboanga City.

In response, the MNLF Chairman, in a letter I personally delivered to the Indonesian Ambassador, expressed difficulty in agreeing to the suggested date because it was just barely a week after Ramadhan; it was difficult for him to travel from Saudi Arabia to Zamboanga considering the distance that he should cover. He was not sure how soon the GRP could prepare the Consultation as they suggested earlier. In addition, I also relayed the other concerns of the MNLF Chairman to the Indonesian Ambassador in a letter dated February 5. “The MNLF leadership would like to be properly guided and appraised of the role of the MNLF Peace Panel, specifically the MNLF Chairman, during the Consultation.” I also reminded the Ambassador that “the subject of popular consultation was proposed by the GRP Panel in the last leg of the recent Jakarta meeting. It was our understanding that the presence of the MNLF Chairman and the OIC representatives in the Consultation would be as ‘guests’ and that the proposed Consultation, being purely government-managed and initiated, would have the participation of no less than President Ramos, the GRP Panel, and the local executives.

In a series of separate meetings with Ambassadors Rajab, Hartono and Yan, I reiterated these concerns of the MNLF, particularly the expected bad weather in this area (between Sabah and Sulu) during

this time of the year. The MNLF Chairman suggested then that the Consultation and the Mixed Committee Meeting be set on the first week of April. But Hartono reminded us that Dr. Hassan who headed the Indonesian Delegation would not be available after March 7. Yan also told me that he would be out of the country starting April 10. The meeting really had to proceed as earlier scheduled. There had to be a way to facilitate the entry of the MNLF Chairman to Jolo.

But even as the representative of the GRP, the MNLF and the OIC continued coordinating their efforts to ensure the success of the consultations and the Mixed Committee Meeting in Zamboanga City, the MNLF still continued to receive reports from the MNLF commanders in the ground of alleged AFP troop movements in the Zamboanga area. What made it alarming to the MNLF was that the officers leading these AFP elements were reportedly the same officers whom the MNLF suspected to have raided their areas in Basilan earlier. These troop movements had caused unnecessary anxiety and fear among the population sympathetic to the MNLF creating an atmosphere of fear and tension not conducive to the peace talks. I relayed the apprehensions of the MNLF to the GRP Panel and the Indonesian and Libyan Ambassadors and informed them of the readiness of the MNLF leaders to discuss this matter with concerned officials so that appropriate measures could be adopted to ensure the success of the meetings.

Parallel to the consultations being worked out by the GRP Panel with local officials in the area, Non-Government Organizations were also preparing their own consultations with the GRP and MNLF Panels. We received a letter of invitation dated February 14 from the Mindanao Alliance for Peace based in Cotabato City. This was “a non-governmental aggregation of various organizations composed of Muslims, Christians and Highlanders in Mindanao.”<sup>5</sup> They invited the GRP and MNLF Panels for consultation-dialogue with the people on various date and places as follows:

February 24	Kidapawan, North Cotabato and Marawi City
February 25	Isulan, Sultan Kudarat and General Santos City
February 26	Cotabato City
February 28	Zamboanga City
March 1	Davao City

Similarly, the Sulu Commission for Peace, a people's organization, headed by Prof. Samsula Adju, Chancellor of Mindanao State University-Sulu, invited the GRP and MNLF Panels to a popular consultation for peace in Jolo on February 24. "This people's initiative is in support of the Ramos Administration's reconciliatory efforts, and the people are inviting the Peace Panels to shed light on the peace negotiation so that the people will know."<sup>6</sup> The Commission also invited Speaker Jose de Venecia.

In the island province of Palawan, various organizations also sent invitations to the GRP and MNLF Panels for the same purpose on February 22 and 23. These organizations were the Palawan Council of Muslim Leaders, the Muslim Association of Puerto Princesa City, and the Foundation for Awareness on the Islamic Teachings and History, and the Palawan Balik Islam Foundation, Inc.

Earlier, the MNLF Secretariat also received a letter from the Philippine Independent Peace Advocates (PIPA) signed by its Secretary General, Teresita Quintos Deles requesting for accreditation at the Popular Consultation and the Mixed Committee Meeting "in the spirit of citizen participation".<sup>7</sup> They also informed the MNLF and the GRP of their "plan to hold a peace advocates' parallel forum [which] aims to serve as a symbol or rallying point for citizens' participation, as a forum and venue for sharing and discussion of issues and proposals, and as a monitor of the flow and outcome of the talks."<sup>8</sup>

All these consultations-dialogues took place as scheduled and were attended by GRP and MNLF authorized representatives.

Meanwhile, after a series of meetings with me, Hartono finally decided to recommend to his home government to provide an air transport facility because he very well understood the difficulties of the MNLF Chairman. The role of Indonesia was precisely to make easy for all the parties in the talks to meet and to facilitate the holding of the meetings. He could not see any benefit in having the negotiations wait for another month, for whatever gains and confidence the Popular Consultation would be able to generate as a result of the meeting with the President, even without the MNLF Chairman, might be dissipated and the momentum might be lost. Actually, Hartono would reveal later that he thought of providing

the Indonesian plane to make “Misuari feel how it was to be a ‘real leader’ if he had governmental authority which would come only with peace.”<sup>9</sup>

With the assurance of transport facility for the MNLF Chairman from the Indonesian Government as approved by Foreign Minister Alatas, the MNLF Secretariat continued the coordination meeting in order to thresh out some concerns in the ground that we presented earlier to the GRP Panel. A top level meeting was arranged with all the parties represented: Ambassador Yan and Rep. Ermita for the GRP Panel; Libyan Ambassador Rajab and Indonesian Ambassador Hartono; for the MNLF, Secretary General Muslimin Sema, Dr. Tham Manjoorsa, MNLF Chief of Staff, Gen. Yusop Jikiri, Atty. Jose Lorena, Chairman of MNLF Support Committee #3 and MNLF Legal Counsel, and the Chairman of the MNLF Secretariat. In that meeting, the GRP officials clarified some issues presented by the MNLF during the Popular Consultation, the issue of AFP troop movements, and other important issues relating to Confidence Building Measures (CBM).

On Sunday, February 25, the MNLF and the OIC Observer Team were already in Jolo making final preparations for the arrival of the MNLF Chairman by private Indonesian Jet from Kuta Kinabalu, Malaysia.

### **The Arrival of the MNLF Chairman**

February 27 was a historic day for the people of Sulu and the MNLF. For the first time since the MNLF waged an armed struggle for *Hulah, Bangsa, Agama* (Homeland, Nation and Islam), peace was finally coming. The leader that had made all of this possible was now coming home like a hero, with the pride and dignity of a Tausug warrior. He was coming home not as an enemy of the State. He was coming home to bring peace to his people. Exactly 22 years ago (February 1974), Jolo—in particular, that part of the landing strip where we were standing—was the site of bloody battles between MNLF and government forces. Thousands of combatants from both sides died. Over 60,000 civilians became homeless refugees. Millions of pesos worth of properties were destroyed, and the town was almost reduced to ashes with only the Grand Tulay Mosque and the Catholic Cathedral left standing. My own parents died in the aftermath of

that seven-day battle. It was a painful and harrowing experience.

Two platoons of MNLF soldiers wearing fresh fatigue uniforms with the MNLF insignia prominently displayed were standing side by side with an equal number of counterparts from the Philippine Marines. They were the honor guards for the MNLF Chairman.

Groups of Muslim leaders, men and women in their native costumes, were also there. The local Department of Education office declared no classes for the day, and the teachers and students, all of them by the thousands, walked to the Airport complete with their uniforms to meet and see a man, a rebel leader, whose name they only heard in whispers and read in the papers but had now become a familiar face in both the national and international arena, particularly in the Muslim World, as the leader of the Muslims in the country. There was jubilation and pride in their hearts for the son of Sulu who came out from the ashes of the Mindanao War who had now come home in the name of peace.

The private executive jet courtesy of Indonesian Minister Alatas came all the way from Jakarta and had a stopover in Kuta Kinabalu to pick up Chairman Misuari and his two aides. As the plane touched down at the Jolo Airport, the crowd shouted “Allahu Akbar” (God is Great).

The MNLF Chairman came out of the plane wearing a Tausug costume complete with a *pis* (Tausug colorful headgear) and was met by MNLF, OIC observers, AFP officers and local officials of Sulu. He delivered a short speech where he said he came home to bring peace and development to his people.

From the airport, the MNLF Chairman boarded a pick-up car, stood at the back and waved to the crowd. The crowd followed the car from behind and slowly they walked about 3 kilometers to his temporary residence in the Sarang Bangun Building in Jolo. MNLF road security (without arms except for those 2 platoons in the company of Philippine Marines), students, and civilians lined-up the streets waving MNLF flaglets and shouting “Allahu Akbar!” (God is Great) and “Peace at Last!” Considering our people’s past experience of suffering and feeling of neglect and their propensity for war, the spectacle was a sight to behold. The people and their leader were marching for peace. We were marching for peace!

From Jolo, the MNLF Chairman and the members of his

entourage boarded a Philippine Navy Boat for Zamboanga City to attend the Popular Consultation and the Mixed Committee Meeting.

### **The Popular Consultation, February 29, Zamboanga City**

The Popular Consultation was the first of its kind to be held in almost two decades of peace talks with the joint attendance of GRP, OIC, MNLF and local officials. The GRP Panel was headed by Ambassador Yan who was with other top GRP panel members and officials, particularly Undersecretary Alexander Aguirre (then of the DILG) who acted as Moderator in the Consultation. OIC Assistant Secretary-General Mohammad Mohsin headed the OIC Delegation which included Libyan Ambassador Rajab and Indonesian Ambassador Hartono. Dr. Hassan Wirajuda headed the Indonesia Delegation. The MNLF Chairman came with 22 Members of his Panel and other MNLF and Muslims leaders.

For the local executives, four governors came (ARMM, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte and Sulu, out of fourteen including ARMM); five others who were representatives of their respective Governors; two city mayors (Zamboanga City and Dipolog City, out of nine); four others who were representatives of their mayors; seventeen municipal mayors; and five Councilors representing their respective Mayors (there were more than 200 Municipalities in the thirteen Province that made up the proposed area of Autonomy mentioned in the Tripoli Agreement).

Reportedly, the MNLF Panel was not impressed with the attendance. The participants did not even constitute 50% of the local executives of the supposed area of autonomy as stipulated in the Tripoli Agreement. The purpose of the GRP in convening that consultation was to generate wider support from the local officials and their constituencies. But judging from this very low attendance, the response of the local officials to the GRP initiatives was not encouraging. It was understandable considering the dynamics of Philippine politics. Even President Ramos admitted, "Controversies started to build up among certain Christian enclaves in Mindanao, generated by the political posturing of local and national leaders."<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the consultation proceeded smoothly with Undersecretary Aguirre acting as Moderator. Ambassador Yan and

Chairman Misuari presented their views on the progress and constraints of the peace talks and requested the support of the local officials for its success. There were some questions raised by certain local officials particularly addressed to the MNLF, especially on the matter of *Shariah* and the issue of plebiscite, which the MNLF Chairman answered. Dr. Hassan, as Chairman of the Mixed Committee Meeting, was also requested to make a statement and he presented the views of the Indonesian Government and the OIC on the peace process declared that “Indonesia, as Chairman of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six as well as ASEAN fellow and neighbor, stands ready to help the Philippines in attaining a comprehensive, just, and durable solution to the conflict in order to create peace and stability in the South East Asian region.”<sup>11</sup>

The consultation nevertheless concluded with the participants “expressing support to the peace process for its aim for peace, stability, sustainable development and prosperity of the people in the region... and requested the GRP Panel to brief them constantly on the results of the negotiations in order to make the process transparent.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The 7<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting**

The meeting was held the following day, March 1. In the informal caucus that preceded the first executive session, the parties decided to focus their attention on the most contentious issue, the question of the establishment of the Provisional Government as called for in the Tripoli Agreement. At the suggestion of the MNLF, the parties agreed that the other equally contentious issues like the joining of the MNLF forces to the AFP, the setting up of the Regional Security Forces and the sharing of revenues and income of Government-Owned and Controlled Corporations between the National Government and the Autonomous Government could be discussed later after the issue of the Provisional Government was resolved.

The first executive session started late in the evening about 8 O'clock. Only selected members of the Panel were in attendance:

**The GRP Panel:** Ambassador Yan, Undersecretary Aguirre, Vice Governor Nabil Tan, Prof. Rody Rodil, Rep. Anthony Dequina, Rep. Belma Cabilao, Undersecretary Feliciano Gacis.

**The MNLF Panel:** Chairman Misuari, Muslimin Sema, Dr. Parouk



Hussein, Hatimil Hassan, Dr. Manjoorsa, Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Gen. Yusop Jikiri, Rev. Absalom Cerveza and Abraham Iribani.

**The OIC and Indonesian Delegations:** Amb. Mohammad Mohsin, Dr. Hassan Wirajuda, Amb. Hartono, and Amb. Rajab.

In the deliberations, the GRP Panel reiterated their proposal for a “two-track approach with modifications” submitted previously at the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meetings as well as at the Third Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta. This approach was for the MNLF to accept the ARMM by participating in the elections while the Peace Talks proceeded. Once the MNLF was in control of the ARMM, they would be given the opportunity to prove their leadership and could initiate moves to expand the ARMM. The expansion of the ARMM would be covered by the Peace Agreement. Congress would come up with an “accession bill” that, once approved, would be presented to the people in a plebiscite. The presence of the MNLF in the ARMM would help generate confidence from the people so that the plebiscite would result in a new expanded area for the new Autonomous Government. There would be other modifications that could take place as the process moved on.

The MNLF Panel maintained their position on the basis of the provision of the Tripoli Agreement (Para 15), which says that “immediately after the signature of the Agreement, a Provisional Government shall be established by the President of the Philippines.” Based on this, the establishment of the Provisional Government and the determination of the area of autonomy should not be done through plebiscite.

The GRP and MNLF positions were obviously on a collision course.

At this juncture, the Chairman of the Mixed Committee Meeting, Dr. Hassan, reminded the two parties of the following:<sup>13</sup>

1. The scheduled ARMM election in September 1996. The MNLF would have to make its formal response to the GRP offer on whether or not to participate in the election before September.
2. The APEC Leaders Meeting (ALEM) in November 1996 in Manila. The success of the peace talks would contribute positively to the success of the ALEM. On the other hand, failure of the talks to produce an agreement would have adverse effects on the ALEM and, consequently, on the Philippine economic development programs.

3. The 24<sup>th</sup> OIC Ministerial Meeting in December 1996 in Jakarta. The OIC Secretary- General endorsed the proposal of Indonesia to host the OIC meeting with the hope that Indonesia, as Chair of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six, would be able to submit its final report on the agenda item of the conflict in Southern Philippines. If the peace talks failed to reach final settlement by that time, Indonesia may just decide to return its mandate to the OIC Ministerial Meeting with a note of dissatisfaction.

These were heavily loaded statements from the Chair of the Mixed Committee Meeting. And it was obvious that the load was tilted heavily towards the MNLF side.

The meeting dragged on till midnight and, realizing that they had reached an impasse, the parties agreed to adjourn the meeting with a positive note: all parties would make further consultations and seek guidance from their respective principals—the MNLF Panel to consult with their leaders and followers; the GRP to consult with higher authorities including the local officials; and the OIC representatives to consult the highest level of their authorities, on matters related to the mechanism for the establishment of the Provisional Government. The participants reached a collective commitment to search for fresh and innovative alternatives to resolve this most contentious issue. The Indonesian Delegation concurred with the suggestion of Ambassador Rajab and Ambassador Mohsin of the OIC to initiate moves for the holding of a Special Meeting at the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six.

The next Mixed Committee Meeting was agreed to be held in the last week of May 1996. As the session resumed in the morning, the parties decided not to take up the issues discussed earlier. Instead, they proceeded to take up issues on the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement and suggested measures to improve confidence-building measures. They also expressed appreciation for the crucial role played by the OIC Observer Team and that their continued stay was very important to the success of the Talks. It was agreed therefore that the stay of the team should be extended until a settlement is reached.

During the plenary session, the MNLF Chairman took the opportunity to submit to the body nine (9) Resolutions issued by various groups from Southern Philippines expressing their support and appreciation for the peace talks.

The parties did not feel the need to continue with the meeting and decided to adjourn early. The Closing Ceremony followed in the afternoon of March 2 shortening the meeting by two days. The OIC representative and the Chairman of the Meeting while expressing concern on the results of the meeting, nevertheless expressed their hope that the next meeting would be an opportunity for both parties to present new proposals to resolve the impasse.

The overall result of the meeting was not really encouraging. Even former President Ramos wrote later that the “impasse remained; the difficulties seemed insurmountable. No fresh solutions were found.”<sup>14</sup>

The national dailies immediately carried the sad news. Words got around that the talks had reached an impasse. Some even said that the talks were going to collapse because the positions of the parties were poles apart.

The MNLF, more than anyone else, felt the seriousness of the situation. Right after the Closing Ceremony, the MNLF Chairman immediately convened the MNLF leaders to a meeting in the evening of March 2. The Chairman expressed doubts on the positive outcome of the talks as he sensed that the GRP panel would maintain their position, which the MNLF found unacceptable. Some leaders also voiced out their views and reiterated their commitment to continue the struggle whatever happened to the talks. The meeting lasted until late in the evening and was resumed in the afternoon of the following day.

On March 12, I, as the MNLF Spokesman, was invited to a TV Talk Show (Channel 4) aired live nationwide and hosted by Chi Chi Fajardo Robles and Mario Garcia. The other guests were Zamboanga Representative Maria Clara Lobregat, South Cotabato Representative Lualhati Antonino, Maguindanao Representative Simeon Datumanong, ARMM Vice-Governor Nabil Tan, and Mr. Nuruddin Lucman. The MNLF Chairman participated by telephone from his temporary residence in Jolo.

One of the phone-in questions asked was about the status of the peace talks. Had the peace talks reached an impasse and was about to collapse? Vice-Governor Nabil Tan answered by saying that it was not true that the talks had reached an impasse. The parties were just taking a pause and were now engaged in further consultations.

I answered by saying that the last meeting held in Zamboanga

City was just on the level of the Mixed Committee that had no authority to make final decision on the issue. There were opposing views, but these could be discussed again in another Mixed Committee Meeting scheduled in May this year. Hopefully the remaining contentious issues would be resolved so that the Fourth and Final round of the Talks could be held to finalize the agreement. Between these meetings, consultations would be made and there was always the real possibility that a solution acceptable to all parties would be found. In addition, there was still another venue where the issues could still be aired—the OIC Ministerial Committee.

### **Overtures from US Congressmen**

In mid-March, the MNLF Secretariat started making preparations for the coming visit of US Congressmen to Jolo to meet with the MNLF Chairman. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher of California wrote to President Ramos about his upcoming visit to the Philippines: “Because peace and stability in the Philippines is in our mutual interest...I am willing to help facilitate an agreement with the MNLF.”<sup>15</sup> This visit was expected in December 1995.<sup>16</sup> Earlier in November 1995, the US Government expressed support to the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. Moreover, the group of Congressman Rohrabacker believed that “the US bears some of the moral responsibility for the Moro conflict.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the visit did not materialize because “none of them [could] make it during the Easter break.”<sup>18</sup> In June 1998, I visited the United States as an MNLF official invited under the US International Visitor Program. I met with Congressman Rohrabacker and Mr. Peter Schaefer. The US officials reiterated their commitments to help in the development of Mindanao. I also arranged the visit of ARMM Governor Misuari to Washington DC in October 1999 where the ARMM Governor met with Congressman Rohrabacker.

In the second week of April, Misuari convened the MNLF leaders to a meeting in Timbangan. MNLF leaders from all over Mindanao, including Palawan, came. The meeting reviewed the progress of the talks and the offer of the GRP for the MNLF to participate in the ARMM election scheduled in September 1996. Some leaders believed that the MNLF had already gone deep into the peace process with most of the provisions in the Tripoli Agreement already entered into

the 1994 and 1995 Interim Agreements signed in Jakarta. Ultimately, the MNLF had to make a decision. The meeting ended with the resolution authorizing the MNLF Chairman to bring the matter to the OIC for final decision. The Chairman then left for Saudi Arabia to join the 1996 Pilgrimage and meet with OIC officials.

For the first time since contacts with the GRP Panel started in 1992, I started to entertain the idea that the talks might just collapse without reaching a final settlement. The MNLF leaders decided not to give any response to the GRP position, but they opted to bring the matter to the OIC for consultation.

It was during this period that I decided to go with my family to Saudi Arabia to join the 1996 Pilgrimage. During difficult times, there was one thing left for believers to do—seek guidance from God.

Those were difficult times indeed. *We were at a crossroad—war or peace.* Our people had been in these road junctions several times in the past. When faced with threats of war from overwhelming force, *and without any third party to lean on for counsel*, they preferred death to compromise or surrender. “The Moros believed they had a right to resist,” observed an American Protestant writer.<sup>19</sup> As a result of “the mailed fist” policy of General Leonard Wood, thousands of Moros led by Datu Ali died in the battle at Kudarangan Valley in 1904 (the site of bloody battles between AFP and MNLF forces in the 1970’s and now with the MILF forces); in the Taraca Expeditions in Lanao del Sur in 1903 and 1904; in the Sulu uprisings in 1903 led by Panglima Hassan, Usap and Pala; and in the bloody battle of Bud Dajo where “the combat was fierce...the slaughter was terrible...more than 600 Moros were dead...including women and children.”<sup>20</sup>

But even while in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, I kept tab of what was happening in the country through the MNLF Secretariat Office in Manila. Reports were received regarding the GRP Panel holding series of consultations with selected and influential sectors in the country and were coming up with innovative proposals to break the impasse in the talks.

In mid-April, President Ramos met with Mindanao leaders in South Cotabato. In that meeting, DILG Undersecretary Alexander Aguirre, also Chairman of the GRP Ad Hoc Working Group unveiled his proposal on the issue of the Provisional Government. The Aguirre peace formula, Ramos wrote later,<sup>21</sup> called for the establishment of a

Zone of Peace and Development (ZOPAD) in the area covering the provinces and cities originally referred to in the Tripoli Agreement; and for the necessary transitional structures—The Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and the Consultative Assembly (CA)—to be created to oversee and coordinate peace and development efforts in the Zone. The concept was to craft a “transitional structure and mechanism” that would be consistent with the Tripoli agreement, and yet be within the ambit of the Philippine Constitution. This formula was strengthened and enriched by a parallel study made by Deputy Speaker Simeon Datumanong who had proposed the organization of a Consultative and Development Council in Southern Philippines with features similar to the SPCPD.<sup>22</sup>

Reportedly, the GRP sent copies of the proposals to Jakarta and the OIC in Jeddah through diplomatic channels for information and consideration. President Ramos also sent a letter with an *aide memoire* to President Suharto to ask for “the Indonesian President’s assistance, as I acknowledged his consistent efforts in the past to facilitate matters and to assist all participants in their common difficulties. Similar communication was also sent to the Libyan Leader Muammar Khaddafy.”<sup>23</sup>

The MNLF also received copies of these proposals even while in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. On May 6 the MNLF was scheduled to meet with the OIC Secretary General in the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah. On the way to the meeting, the MNLF Chairman told me, “If the Government will insist on this position which is no different from their previous positions, I am afraid the talks might just collapse and we might go back to a war situation again.” He asked me then what he would do next if the talks collapsed. I said “I do not think about it, Chairman, because the thought of it will just obstruct me from my work. I will proceed with whatever I am doing”.

It was a vague answer but that was the best answer I could give under the circumstances. In the past, the collapse of the talks would always lead to the resumption of hostilities.

In a war situation, people have very limited choices. The Greeks found a long time ago that “people go to war out of honor, fear, and interest.”<sup>24</sup> You either stand up and fight or run away to live in ignominy. Moro elders (veterans of past wars) have transmitted oral

traditions to their sons, “*Marayaw pa mutih in bukug ayaw in tikud-tikud.*” This is a Tausug traditional saying, which means, “It is better for the bones to whiten (in the grave) than to whiten the sole of the feet (to run away from a fight).”

But does one have any choice at all? Death is not a choice. It is an act of God because “*Nothing will happen to us except what God has decreed for us. He is our protector.*” (Qur’an, IX: 51) “*But if the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace and trust in God.*” (Qur’an, VIII: 61)

The MNLF Delegation met with the OIC Secretary General in his office and Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin, his Special Representative to the GRP-MNLF Talks and Dr. Zawawi joined that meeting.

The MNLF Chairman gave his assessment of the recent GRP proposal. According to him, the proposal cannot was incompatible with the stand of the MNLF on the issue of the establishment of the Provisional Government.

Then Ambassador Mohsin said, “*This is the moment of truth, Brother Nur.* The clamor of the people in Southern Philippines is overwhelmingly for peace. This is now the time to decide, and we do not have the luxury of time anymore. Whatever your decision is, the OIC will support you.”

On the way back, the Chairman and Ustadz Abdulbaki remained silent. It was not an easy thing for them to make that decision. In 1976 they were also together when they made that historic decision in Tripoli—to accept the Autonomy Formula—which led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement. Ustadz Hashim Salamat, who was then the MNLF Vice-Chairman, was with them when they made that decision. Their decision to agree on autonomy under the counsel of the OIC later on wreaked havoc on the once solid MNLF leadership that until then was acknowledged to be the unified vanguard of the contemporary Moro struggle for *Mahardika* (Independence).

That must have been a bleak period for the MNLF leadership. Internal divisions among the senior leaders ensued. Salamat left the leadership of Misuari in December 1977, a year after the signing of the Tripoli Agreement. He challenged the leadership of Misuari but failed to get the official recognition of the OIC. He succeeded however in inviting to his fold most of the Maguindanao leaders of

the MNLF in Central Mindanao and later on organized what is now the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Other senior MNLF leaders followed. Dimas Pundato who replaced Salamat as Vice Chairman also left Misuari and came up with his MNLF-Reformist Group and, in 1988, accepted the offer of the Aquino Government to head the Office on Muslim Affairs.

And yet the decision to accept the formula of autonomy was made upon the advice of the OIC. The MNLF Chairman must have been haunted by the negative effects of that decision on the ranks of the MNLF. But he had to make a decision now, as the OIC again had advised. Time was no longer in his favor. The leaders of the MNLF had been in the struggle for over two decades. The MILF, though expressing support for the Peace Talks, continued to build up their military strength and was espousing the idea of an Islamic State; the Abu Sayyaf Group was recruiting more members; and the MNLF-Islamic Command Council had already denounced the leadership of Chairman Misuari.

After that meeting with the OIC officials, Misuari made preparations for his trip to Libya upon the invitation of Libyan leaders. He gave me the contact numbers for any urgent call for him, otherwise, he said, "I cannot be reached in Libya because this will be a very important meeting that will last about a week and I do not want to be disturbed unless the call is really very important with direct bearing on the peace talks." He told me to keep the number to myself for security reasons.

While still in Jeddah, waiting for a return flight to Manila, I received a call from the MNLF Secretariat staff in Manila to inform me about a telephone call they received from the Office of Executive Secretary Torres who wanted to talk to me on a very important matter. That important matter must be related to the new proposal of the GRP.

I arrived in Manila with my family in the morning of Sunday, May 19. Traditionally, one who had just arrived from Pilgrimage should stay home in order to receive families and friends who would welcome the pilgrims from a successful journey. But under those circumstances, I had no time for this traditional practice. Immediately, I began to work. I responded to the call from Secretary Torres. Contacts were established while Secretary Torres was



undergoing medical check-up in a hospital in New York. He said he wanted to get in touch with the MNLF Chairman, as instructed by President Ramos.<sup>25</sup> To emphasize the importance and urgency of his request, he said, "I could meet the Chairman in any place of his choice even outside the country."

I immediately contacted the telephone number in Tripoli the Chairman gave me earlier. I was told, however, that the Chairman couldn't be reached until after three (3) days. The Chairman was able to return the call on May 25. He said he was in Benghazi and that meeting he attended was so important that he couldn't leave without finishing it. He did not elaborate. But in a recent interview, Ambassador Rajab revealed that Libya "took it upon [themselves]" to convince Chairman Misuari to negotiate for the new formula offered by GRP. It took them ten days.<sup>26</sup>

I informed the MNLF Chairman about the request of Secretary Torres. He said, "You ask him what the subject matter for discussion is because I cannot at this time entertain anything that may disturb our decision-making process towards resolving the present impasse."

The MNLF Chairman apparently was not expecting any serious message from Sec. Torres at this time. I had to call back Sec. Torres in New York. He then clearly specified his request that he wanted to discuss with the Chairman on a one-on-one basis the new proposal of the GRP Panel. "This is not the one that is being reported in the papers," Secretary Torres emphasized.

Initially, the MNLF Chairman suggested that they could meet in Malta, an Island Republic in the Mediterranean facing Tripoli. But he had to stay there for only 24 hours and had to proceed to Pakistan. Secretary Torres was still in New York and he could not leave the hospital until May 27. Besides, it was difficult to arrange flights to Malta or Pakistan from New York. I then suggested Dubai, United Arab Emirates. "Yes," Secretary Torres said, "because we have an Embassy there that could facilitate my trip and the travel documents." The MNLF Chairman agreed because it was also easy for him to go there from Pakistan. One of the Chairman's sons was studying in Dubai and he had been frequenting that country recently and became close to the royal families. The Philippine Ambassador to the UAE was Ambassador Roy Seneres.

The meeting in Dubai between the Chairman and Secretary Torres

was finally agreed upon and set on May 29. The two friends spent one whole day exchanging views on the new GRP proposal.

On May 21, MNLF Secretary General Muslimin Sema and I met with Ambassador Rajab where he informed us of the new GRP proposal. He informed the MNLF that “the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six [was] now preparing to call for a special meeting in Jakarta to respond to this new development.” On May 22, Indonesian Ambassador Hartono invited the MNLF to a dinner meeting. Also present in that meeting were Ambassador Rajab and representatives from the embassies of Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh. In that meeting, Ambassador Hartono handed over to the MNLF his “Confidential Letter” to the MNLF Chairman. The same letters were also sent to the other members of the OIC Committee of Six.

Ambassador Hartono then explained to the MNLF that Indonesia had urgently appealed to the GRP to address with all seriousness the issue on the establishment of the Provisional Government, which had been the most contentious issue in the GRP-MNLF Talks. The GRP responded to this appeal and submitted its latest proposal with the letter of President Ramos to President Suharto. This new proposal was the result of a series of consultations conducted under the directives of President Ramos. Reportedly, the GRP proposal was the “ultimate offer” and beyond that would be a violation of the Philippine Constitution, which the GRP Panel could afford to commit. That new proposal from the GRP was in addition to an earlier proposal inviting the MNLF to join the Ramos Administration political party (Lakas-NUCD) in the 1996 ARMM election.

“Because of this new development,” Amb. Hartono emphasized, “Indonesia, as Chair of the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six, proposed to convene a special meeting of the OIC Ministerial Committee where representatives from the GRP and MNLF Panels will be invited. The meeting is proposed to take place on June 1-2 in Jakarta.”

From the way Ambassador Hartono explained the situation to the MNLF, it appeared Indonesia was convinced of the soundness of the new GRP position. They looked at it as the “ultimate way out” of the impasse. They also viewed the power of the proposed SPCPD as coming from the Office of the President. Real political power was therefore assured, not to mention the financial resources that the

office could mobilize because of its direct link to the President.

### The Special OIC Meeting in Jakarta

The MNLF Panel arrived in Jakarta on June 2. The Chairman and his wife came in from Dubai in the evening. Immediately, Misuari called the MNLF leaders to a meeting. His first statement was "*Brothers, this is the moment of truth.*" Then he continued, "I believe the Indonesian Government is convinced of the new GRP proposal as the ultimate proposal. To my mind, the MNLF position, our position after having made so many concessions, [makes it] now very difficult for us to move back without being destroyed. This is my impression of the new developments. This is the reason I requested for your presence here. We will evaluate the situation before I face the OIC and the GRP in this Special Meeting."

Before any one was even able to respond to that revelation from the MNLF Chairman, the meeting was interrupted by the visit of three important men in the talks: Ambassador Mohsin of the OIC, Ambassador Rajab of Libya, and Ambassador Hartono of Indonesia.

Ambassador Mohsin's first statement was the same as what the Chairman had just said. "*This is the moment of truth*", he declared. "We want to hear from you, Brother Nur," Ambassador Mohsin continued. "What are your assessments and your vision? If you find something in the GRP proposal that is not yet clear, then we can clear it in the meeting tomorrow. The GRP Panel is also coming to make clarifications on their new proposal."

Ambassador Hartono followed by saying "this meeting will be from top to bottom." I understood it to mean that decisions would be made from the top—in the case of Indonesia, President Suharto; for Libya, Col. Khaddaffy; and for the OIC, the Secretary-General. For the GRP Panel, the decision was contained in their latest communications signed by President Ramos. For the MNLF, that was precisely the reason why we were in that meeting—to get the final decision from the MNLF Chairman.

Then the MNLF Chairman, after asking guidance and blessings from Allah, started by relating what transpired in his one-on-one meeting with Executive Secretary Torres.

There was no recording of that meeting. Secretary Torres even promised [me] that he would follow to Jakarta if the President would allow. "But the GRP Panel headed by Ambassador Yan will be empowered by the President and they will present what I will tell you now," Torres told [me].

The GRP position was the declaration of the Zone of Peace and Development (ZOPAD) and the establishment of the SPCPD with an Executive Council and the Consultative Assembly to be deputized by COMELEC during the referendum or plebiscite. It would be administrative and developmental in character. With regard to the terms of office, this is not yet certain. But this can always be extended.

"Even if there is a change in Administration," Torres told [me], "you do not have to worry because they will need you—they will need peace. *But you have to make good, the first two or four years* [Italics mine]. Regarding the referendum, the COMELEC can delegate the SPCPD. For the area, you must control the ARMM and then add the remaining 10 provinces. The wisdom here is that the ARMM has political control. The present ARMM officials (particularly Governor Pangandaman) did not know how to use it. As to funding, President Ramos has contingency funds. He gave his word. President Ramos wants you to decide on projects; the funds will be coming also from the existing Departments of Government. With regards to the Consultative Council, the members can be increased so that the MNLF or its representatives will be the majority. The Head of the Executive Council will be the same as the Head of the Assembly. The Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA) can be utilized for development because it has assets. MNLF integration with the AFP can be further discussed and so can the Regional Security Force. The 123 consensus points in the Interim Agreements can be part of this and those that do not need congressional approval can be implemented. The Provisional Government will come after the plebiscite. The Constitution cannot really be avoided."

Ambassador Rajab butted in by saying that President Ramos was sincere and committed to make this new arrangement a success. This is the extension of my office, Ramos said, according to Ambassador Rajab. He further said that the next Philippine leaders might view autonomy in a different way. "What we need from you now is your opinion on the GRP proposal, your bottom line, which you might reach in this caucus that you are having now. This is very crucial" Ambassador Rajab emphasized.

Ambassador Mohsin said "everybody has to help you...you can reach out to others outside of the MNLF...some may not agree but the broad stream of your people will support this...you can reach

out to the MILF leaders.”

Chairman Misuari, in spite of the positive impressions he had so far, asked assurance from the OIC of its support because, he said, “no matter how good is the GRP commitment, there will always be inadequacies from its leaders. How do we prevent this from happening?”

Ambassador Mohsin replied by saying that in the Agreement, the OIC will always be there to monitor the progress of implementation.

After the Muslim Ambassadors left, the rest of the MNLF Panel members started to express their respective views. Reverend Absalom Cerveza raised his hand and said, “We cannot rely on verbal guarantees. It can be denied, as we have experienced in the past.”

Reverend Cerveza was referring to what appeared so far as verbal guarantees made by Executive Secretary Torres to Chairman Misuari. Verbal guarantees made by “friends of the MNLF” during the talks with the Aquino Government (former Senator and now Makati Representative Agapito “Butz” Aquino, Partidong Demokratikong Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSP) Chairman Norberto Gonzales, and Senator Pimentel). These Aquino leaders made many commitments most of them verbally and did nothing or were not able to do anything about it that led to the collapse of the GRP-MNLF Talks in 1987.

I noticed that the MNLF Chairman seemed to have been upset by the comments made, as they placed a cloud of doubt on that unrecorded meeting with his friend from his UP days. Then he stood up and said, “I did not come here to surrender to the Government. We can still continue the struggle. What is hanging on the balance now is the question of peace or war. If we chose war, then we do not even have to attend this meeting tomorrow. But we are here, all of us, because we want to avail of the counsel of the OIC.”

Dr. Parouk Hussein said, “The MNLF has reached a very crucial stage. The crux of the matter is the issue of credibility. Are we now convinced that the GRP is sincere? What assurance do we get from the OIC? All of these may be an effort to kill the struggle. The new formula for peace is economic development, the way the GRP looks at it. There is also American interest coming up.”

Rev. Cerveza requested to say his final comments and said, "The GRP proposal cannot approximate the barest of the MNLF demands. To me, this new development is not good. The GRP is trying in this formula to 'localize' the issue."

When his turn to speak came, Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin said, "The question of war cannot be decided in this meeting. We have to go to the ground and ask our people. We have to be realistic."

The MNLF Chairman again took the floor and said, "The GRP is having difficulty trying to come up with a political autonomy formula as clearly defined in the Tripoli Agreement. This can be challenged in the courts by anyone and the case will drag on to our disadvantage."

The discussions dragged on until the wee hours of the morning. Time for early Morning Prayer was coming up. Then Ustadz Abdalbaki Abubakar stood up and said the last words for the night, "Everything is negotiable." It drew laughter from everybody.

But before the MNLF finally went to bed, we (Atty. Didagen Dilangalen, Atty. Jose Lorena, Atty. Blo Adiong, and I) sat down to draft the opening statements to be delivered by the Chairman in tomorrow's meeting. On the table laid an unfinished draft made by the Chairman. We continued with the work and left the paper on the Chairman's table with the following tentative statements in my handwriting:

Mr. Chairman and Excellencies;

To be frank about it, if we take this proposal as is, then we cannot help but say, that first of all the GRP Peace Panel is now trying to run away from the letter and spirit of the Tripoli Agreement. Consequently, they were not able to comply with the best suitable modalities for the implementation of the Tripoli agreement.

Because this proposal does not entail the establishment of a political institution as provided for in the Tripoli Agreement, Article III, Sec. 15 of the Tripoli Agreement calls for the immediate establishment of the Provisional Government after the signing of the "Final Accord".

Therefore, instead of bringing us to the final solution, they have succeeded in creating a yawning gap between us. For this reason, they have muddled up the whole thing and made it literally impossible for us to move forward.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, before we came here, it was our expectations that we would be discussing the Provisional Government based on the Tripoli agreement plus the 123 consensus points and this offer to grant us the 14 Provinces and 10 Cities without referendum/plebiscite.

But now with this proposition before us, we are very sorry to say that this situation is bleak and gloomy before our eyes. Therefore we would like to request the OIC to bring the GRP back—to use all the influence and wisdom to bring them back to the Peace Process.

The MNLF certainly will not put unnecessary burden to this Honorable Body. We know the difficulties. Therefore as we could see it, if the GRP finds it difficult, then this Honorable Body can come up with a proposition to bring them back to the Tripoli Agreement – by putting substance to this proposal as follows:

- Peace and Order
- Free Hand in planning for development of the area and budgeting including representation in the BIMP-EAGA
- Referendum should be handled by the authorities in the area.
- Implementation of Shariah for the Muslims
- Appropriations of existing Departments including the SPDA
- Administrative authority particularly over the local government and line agencies in the area
- Withdrawal of AFP troops in the area
- Administrative funds.

The following day, June 3, the meeting started at the Department of Foreign Affairs Office. The attendance was formidable. It only showed the level of importance of the meeting and how critical and urgent it was to the issue of war and peace in Mindanao.

The Government of the Royal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sent four (4) top-level Ministers headed by Deputy Foreign Minister, H. E. Sayyed Abdul Rahman Mansuri. The Republic of Senegal sent three (3) representatives headed by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Ambassador Fode Seck. The Government of Bangladesh sent two (2) representatives headed by Additional Foreign Secretary and Chief of Protocol, H.E. Ambassador A.K.M. Farooq. H.E. Ambassador Rajab Azzarouq and the Libyan Ambassador to Jakarta, H.E. Ambassador Tjeddin A. Jerbi, represented the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Ambassador Mohammad

Mohsin represented the OIC Secretary General.

The Indonesian Delegation was headed by no less than Indonesia's Foreign Minister, H.E. Ali Alatas. With him were the most familiar faces in the talks: H.E. Ambassador S. Wiryono who was already then Indonesia's Ambassador to Australia; Dr. Hassan Wirajuda, Director for International Organization at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the GRP-MNLF Mixed Committee Meetings; H.E. Ambassador Abu Hartono, Indonesia's Ambassador to Manila; H.E. Ambassador Izhar Ibrahim, Director General for Political affairs; and Mr. Tjahjono, Director for Asia and the Pacific Affairs.

The GRP Panel was composed of H.E. Ambassador Manuel T. Yan, Chairman; Hon. Representative Eduardo R. Ermita, Vice-, H.E. Secretary Alexander P. Aguirre, Chairman of the GRP Ad Hoc Working Group and main author of the new GRP Proposal; and Atty. Silvestre Affable, Technical Assistant.

Three leaders represented the MNLF Panel—MNLF Chairman Misuari; MNLF Secretary-General Muslimin Sema, and MNLF Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Dr. Parouk Hussein.

After the morning session, the MNLF Chairman came back to brief the members of the MNLF Panel. He had with him the GRP paper with the title, "Proposed Position on the Transitional Structure and Implementing Mechanism: A Non-Paper of the GRP Ad Hoc Working Group, For Discussion."

In this emergency caucus, the MNLF Panel came up with two major decisions in reaction to the said GRP paper:

- The OIC should be informed that the GRP paper was inadequate as far as the issue of the Provisional Government is concern
- The OIC therefore should make official commitment to help ensure the success of the transition mechanism

Then the afternoon session resumed. At about 10:15 in the evening the MNLF Chairman and the two other leaders came back with new results. In the caucus that followed, the MNLF Chairman informed the body of the following:

- The MNLF was advised to rest the case with the OIC. The Saudi Arabian delegation wanted to finish the talks in order to reach a final



agreement.

- The MNLF Chairman made maximum efforts to present the MNLF case. He made a lengthy but extemporaneous presentation of the MNLF position tracing the stand of the MNLF since the negotiations with the Philippine Government started in 1975 under the auspices of the OIC. He emphasized the pending application of the MNLF for membership in • the OIC as a guarantee in case the GRP fails to comply with its commitment in the agreement and to prevent the Bangsamoro people from being isolated from the Muslim World as in the past. The OIC Representative (Ambassador Mohsin) gave a positive response “the OIC is master of its own rules”; Bangladesh gave full support to the idea; Libya gave positive comments; Saudi Arabia remained silent on the issue. (The Delegation from Senegal was not reported to have said anything on the issue). But the GRP Panel gave positive response.
- During the discussion, the MNLF Chairman said, Executive Secretary Torres was in constant contact with the GRP Panel by telephone.
- The OIC gave commitments to help secure development funds for the Autonomous Region.
- Foreign Minister Alatas suggested to review the 123 consensus points and those that can be implemented by executive fiat should be recommended to the GRP for implementation while the rest can be part of the Final Agreement. Dr. Parouk Hussein confirmed this, as the GRP did not pose any objection to the said proposition.

Atty. Dilangalen asked the body, “Have we agreed already to the GRP proposal?” The MNLF Chairman replied, “There is no agreement yet...but the issues are now becoming clear. The Christian sectors have expressed fear and apprehension. With this in our hands, it is now time for us to be fair and just. We should invite everyone. We should invite the MILF leaders.”

The MNLF Chairman also reported that the GRP Panel renewed their offer for MNLF participation in the ARMM. The scheduled September 1996 election could not be moved anymore. In addition, the GRP also renewed their offer for MNLF to send representative to Congress to be appointed by Sectoral Representative. The OIC also appreciated the GRP offer for the MNLF to take the ARMM so that its powers and resources could be utilized to expand the area in accordance with the agreement.

Then the MNLF Chairman asked the body “will we accept participation in the ARMM?” Reverend Cerveza said, “Yes, it is

expedient.” “Then we should control it,” said Ustadz Abdalbaki. “It was offered to us. We should take it. It is now a matter of deciding who should take the position of ARMM Governor.”

Hatimil Hassan, MNLF Vice-Chairman, suggested asking President Ramos to do away with election so that MNLF representatives can be appointed to the ARMM posts. Reverend Cerveza supported the suggestion. He argued, “Election will divide our people because we cannot stop anyone from running.”

The MNLF Chairman then said, “We have to have alternatives. First, we will suggest the process of selection by appointment. If this is not possible, then we make decision on whether to participate in the ARMM election or not. Everything will still be finalized tomorrow. We have to prepare our working papers.”

The executive session resumed again in the morning of June 4. Then in the evening, the Chairman came back and called the MNLF to a caucus. He requested Reverend Cerveza to read the three-page paper with the title “Meeting of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six, Jakarta, June 3-4, 1996 (Informal Working Group Meeting)” which contained fourteen (14) Points of Consensus with one point of no-consensus on the number of members in the SPCPD Consultative Assembly.

The details of some of the points agreed would be discussed in the 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting scheduled in Davao City within the month. The Fourth and Final Round of Formal Talks is also agreed to be held before the September 1996 ARMM election.

### **The 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City**

On June 11, Ambassador Hartono sent a letter to the GRP and MNLF Panels to inform them of the proposal to hold the 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting in Davao City from 19 to 21 June.

Then as we approached the final leg of the talks in the country and bearing in mind the consensus reached in the Jakarta Special OIC meeting, the parties began to be conscious as ever of the security aspects of the situation. Ambassador Hartono, as Presiding Officer of the GRP-MNLF Joint Ceasefire Committee (JCC) immediately sent notices to the GRP and MNLF Panels and gave instructions to the Officer-in-Duty of the OIC Observer Team. In his letter to Brig.

Gen. Kivlan Zen, Commander of the OIC Observer Team, he emphasized that “as provided in the JCC Guidelines and Ground Rules, that the security of the Meeting and the VIPs Delegations should be arranged under the coordination within the JCC, which composed of the officers from the GRP-JCC (AFP and PNP), the MNLF-JCC and the OIC Observer Team, I hereby instruct you to convene and chair a JCC Coordinating Meeting to discuss the details of the security arrangements.”<sup>27</sup> In his letter addressed to the Chairmen of GRP and MNLF-JCC, the Ambassador enumerated the details of the Security arrangements as agreed upon with the Chairman of the GRP Peace Panel, Ambassador Manuel Yan, as follows:

- The MNLF Chairman will arrive Jolo on June 17 by sea transport...the Philippine Navy and Marines will secure the waters between Sabah and Jolo...the MNLF will be provided with the Philippine Navy ship to bring them to Davao City from Jolo.
- The MNLF Chairman will be accompanied by Brig. Gen. Zen and selected number of officers of the Philippine Marines on board the Philippine Navy Ship when proceeding to Davao City.
- He proposed that the GRP-JCC with the OIC observers convene a meeting in Zamboanga City on June 15 to discuss these matters.

In his letter to the Chairmen of Support Committees #1 (Defense) and #4 dated June 14, he reminded them of the understanding to hold a Joint Session of the two Support Committees to discuss the following agenda in Davao City before the Mixed Committee Meeting:

- The Arrangements of the Joining of the MNLF Forces with the AFP
- The Setting Up of the Special Regional Security Forces.

The MNLF Secretariat also sent a letter to Davao City Mayor Hon. Rodrigo Duterte to inform him of the said meeting. “The most successful Mixed Committee Meeting with the most number of consensus points achieved was the 5<sup>th</sup> MCM held in Davao City in June 1995...we look forward to another successful Mixed Committee Meeting...with the support and cooperation of the City Government and people of Davao.”<sup>28</sup>

After the first session of the Joint Meeting of SC#1 and #4 in the afternoon of June 17 at Davao Insular Hotel, the MNLF Panel held a

caucus in the evening to review the progress of the meeting. Their unanimous conclusion was that the GRP was pressing on their position, which the MNLF Panel found “unacceptable.” They said that if the GRP Panel were to insist on such a position, there would be another impasse.

The MNLF Secretariat contacted Misuari who was still in Jolo by telephone and appraised him of the situation particularly the assessment of the MNLF leaders on the result of their first meeting with the GRP Panel. The Chairman told the MNLF Secretariat to inform the GRP, particularly Ambassador Yan, Congressman Ermita, and Secretary Torres, that he would not come to Davao City if there was no assurance of a positive outcome of the meeting particularly on the issue of MNLF integration into the AFP and PNP and the setting up of the Regional Security Force. He would rather stay in Jolo to wait for the result of the Support Committee meeting and, if that turned out to be negative, the 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting would have to be postponed because there was no point in proceeding with the meeting if there was no assurance of any agreement.

In the second session of the SC# 1 and #4 in the morning of June 18, the GRP Panel presented a Supplementary Position Paper with the title “Guiding Principles on the Relationship of Security/Police/Military Forces vis-à-vis the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development.” The MNLF also presented their paper with the title “MNLF Support Committee No. 4, Position on the Establishment of the SRSE.”

With these important documents on hand, I decided to send a note by facsimile to Executive Secretary Torres in Malacanang attaching the two opposing position papers. The said note reads as follows:

There is no consensus yet on this and the atmosphere in the talks is not conducive for the entry of the MNLF Chairman...until now he is still in Jolo and is expected to reach Lumatil, Sarangani late this afternoon...it would be best if you could meet him there so that you'll have time to exchange views and proceed to Davao City together for the meeting on June 20...all the MNLF leaders will also proceed to that area...they believed it is better this way than for the Chairman to come to Davao without any assurance of a positive result.

Secretary Torres replied in the afternoon. He told me that he just had a meeting with President Ramos and he showed the President

the note. The President then gave him clearance to come to Davao tomorrow to see the MNLF Chairman. He said, "Tell Brother Nur, I have the clearance from the President to meet with him to clear all his doubts and I will meet with the GRP Panel on this issue."

Secretary Torres arrived in Davao City in the afternoon of June 19. But the MNLF Chairman was still in Jolo. When he was informed that Secretary Torres was already in Davao, the MNLF Chairman left Jolo in the morning of June 20 and arrived in Lumatil, Sarangani in the early afternoon. He then requested me to meet with Secretary Torres in Lumatil. But Torres said it was not possible because his going there might be subject to speculations that would have a negative impact on the Davao Meeting.

I conferred with Ambassador Mohsin, Ambassador Rajab and Ambassador Hartono who were already waiting in the hotel. I briefed them about the situation. Then I contacted the MNLF Chairman by cell phone. The Muslim Ambassadors talked to him and they gave him assurance. I went back to Sec. Torres, had him talk to Misuari by cell phone. After that conversation, the Chairman agreed to proceed to the hotel. He and his party arrived at about 10 in the evening. An hour after, he sat down with Sec Torres. Congressman Ermita joined them later on and they exchanged views until the early morning hours. Then the MNLF Chairman left his "friends" for his early morning prayer.

First hour in the morning, the MNLF Chairman held an emergency caucus with the MNLF leaders. They prepared their final position on the remaining contentious issues. I felt in that meeting that the load had lightened up, as some difficult issues were cleared in that "friendly meeting" with Sec. Torres and Congressman Ermita and later on with the OIC Delegation. I left the MNLF caucus with a new sense of hope that the Davao meeting would finally come up with a positive ending. I joined Sec. Torres and Congressman Ermita over lunch and I could also sense in the two "friends" of the MNLF Chairman the same feeling of optimism.

As the parties prepared for the Opening Ceremony of the Mixed Committee, I realized that this was the biggest meeting so far in terms of number of Delegations. The OIC and Indonesian Delegations came with 22 members; the GRP with 102; and the MNLF with 100 in addition to those who were not yet registered. The Hotel

was packed with people, from all sectors, Muslims, Christians, Highlanders, politicians, businessmen, professionals and certainly the representatives from the Tri-Media. I sensed that all of them came with high expectations. They did not want to miss the event—it was history in the making. The world, in fact, was watching the historic events unfolding in Davao through the presence of members of the foreign media.

I also realized then that I was at the center of all these events, performing crucial roles that only the principal actors in the talks knew about. I was not only playing the role of an MNLF Emissary to the GRP in addition to my very demanding job as Chairman of the MNLF Secretariat and Spokesman of the MNLF Panel. I was also entrusted important and confidential messages from the GRP and OIC to deliver to the MNLF Chairman. Instead of directly talking to the MNLF Chairman or sending their representatives, they entrusted to me that delicate job. There was indeed enough confidence generated among the principal players that they could trust one man to do that critical coordination for all of them.

The Opening Ceremony started at about 4 in the afternoon. In his opening remarks, Dr. Hassan Wirajuda, Chairman of the Meeting, said, “the 8<sup>th</sup> MCM is very crucial in our preparation for the final stage in the peace process—the Final Round of Formal Peace Talks...What we need now is goodwill, political vision and courage.”<sup>29</sup>

Ambassador Yan said, “The next few days are crucial. They shall demand, as ever, the utmost of our perseverance, understanding and spirit of accommodation. Our focus is ...now directed at the two most difficult issues of the entire negotiations: the joining of the MNLF with the AFP and the setting up of the Regional Security Forces. On this note of urgency, I therefore wish to reiterate the firm commitment of our Government and our national leadership to bring our negotiations to a just, comprehensive and durable end.”<sup>30</sup>

Chairman Misuari on the other hand said, “I was caught in ambivalence. I do not know what to do”<sup>31</sup> After saying that his earlier impression was wrong that there would be smooth progress of the talks after the issues on plebiscite and territorial coverage was settled, what remains, he said was “one very fundamental issue that could also decide the fate of these talks—the question of the internal security force...it is even becoming more and more crucial than the issue of

plebiscite or territory.”<sup>32</sup>

And in the middle part of his speech he declared, “I would like to inform the honorable members and Chairman of the GRP Panel and this honorable body that the MNLF is ready to make accommodation on any other remaining issues but not on this fundamental issue of the Internal Security Force.”

The executive sessions that followed tackled issues on the Joining of the MNLF into the AFP and the PNP and the remaining points on the establishment of the transitional implementing structures and mechanism. “The MNLF Chairman demanded that 20,000 MNLF forces join the PNP during the transitional period and be assigned to the SPCPD Council...but both sides failed to reach an agreement and in order to settle the issue...the meeting agreed to form a Working Group composed of representatives from the two Panels to be chaired by Indonesia...with the instruction to meet at the earliest time before the 4<sup>th</sup> Round of the Formal Talks.”<sup>33</sup>

The issue of MNLF participation in the ARMM was also discussed in the executive sessions. There was positive response from the MNLF Panel to participate in the ARMM as they clarified some technical issues but expressed their preference for the President to appoint “Officer-In-Charge” for the ARMM from the MNLF. The GRP Panel reiterated their offer for the MNLF Chairman to run for ARMM Governor with the support of the Lakas Party of the Ramos Administration.

At the end of the sessions, the Meeting came up with 16 points of consensus on The Establishment of the SPCPD; and 21 consensus points on The Establishment of the Special Regional Security Force for the Regular Autonomous Regional Government (Phase II of the Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement). Four parties, the GRP, MNLF, OIC Secretary General and the OIC Ministerial Committee of Six, signed the document consisting of 6 pages.

In his Closing Statement, Ambassador Yan said, “we defeated our most mortal challenges—distrust, suspicion, fear and deception. We have faced each other with candor, with openness, and fraternal boldness. These are immeasurable gains that shall continue to carry us forward to a deserved triumph—a triumph over war, conflict, poverty, stagnation and injustice.”<sup>34</sup>

The MNLF Chairman declared: “The most contentious (issues)

have already been overcome... but...what is going to follow after the signing...that is more vital than just signing a final agreement...I am afraid that if we fail in the end despite the signing of the agreement, we might be condemned to repeat the bitterness of the past...and it might be very difficult for us to return to the negotiating table...I would like to appeal to you (Ambassador Yan) to convey to His Excellency the President...that whatever agreement we will sign with you, you will commit to his honor and to his integrity and the honor and integrity of his government to implement your part of the agreement.”<sup>35</sup>

He also asked the OIC to “do everything to insure that none of us will betray our commitment to peace and to our people and posterity”.<sup>36</sup>

Ambassador Mohsin of the OIC said “that the OIC and its members are determined to preserve and consolidate the achievement aimed at realizing the tranquility and progress in the Republic of the Philippines ...and to this region.”<sup>37</sup>

Ambassador Rajab was also invited to give his statement where he said that “with our political will, we have been able to pave the way for the last round of our work, which had been blessed and supported by President Suharto, by our leader Muammar Qaddafi; by all the OIC countries and ...by the leadership of President Ramos.”<sup>38</sup>

### **The MNLF Candidate for ARMM Governor**

On July 2, MNLF leaders gathered in Jolo for a meeting with the MNLF Chairman. Specifically called to that crucial meeting were the State Chairmen and other selected national leaders. The subject of the meeting: Selection of the MNLF candidate for ARMM Governor.

At about 11:30 in the morning of July 3, the MNLF Chairman agreed to meet with about 40 MNLF leaders coming from all over Mindanao including Tawi-Tawi and Palawan. I was there when the meeting started. Without further introduction, the Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who acted as Moderator, asked the leaders in attendance to raise their hands if they were in favor of allowing the MNLF Chairman to run as ARMM Governor. Only



about 13 to 15 leaders raised their hands. I saw some reluctance in their faces as if they did not know what to decide. It must have been just out of respect for the MNLF Chairman that they raised their hands. Those who did were not even half the number of the leaders present. There were objections.

Ustadz Abdulkaki Abubakar expressed his objection to the proposal for the MNLF Chairman to accept the ARMM offer. Dr. Parouk Hussein also expressed the same opinion. The MNLF Chairman of Basilan, Brig. Gen. Talib Congo stood up to retract the "Yes" vote he made earlier.

*Then when the issue was again put to a vote, it became clear that the majority did not want to endorse the proposal for the MNLF Chairman to accept the offer and become a candidate for ARMM Governor.*

The meeting ended abruptly without any clear decision on the issue. I told the MNLF Chairman that he could relay the message to Sec. Torres verbally since the offer was not also made in writing. In this way, it would be easy to make adjustments in case there would be changes in the decision.

The MNLF Chairman proceeded to Tawi-Tawi and I went back to Manila. On July 5, I met with Secretary Torres and Political Adviser Gabby Claudio in Malacanang. I related to them the proceedings. I emphasized the difficulties faced by the Chairman in coming up with a final decision. Most of the MNLF leaders did not support the idea. I suggested that Sec. Torres should go to Jolo to personally discuss this matter with the Chairman. It might turn out to be different. The MNLF Chairman can accept or reject the offer in your presence and in the presence of the leaders. In case of rejection, the MNLF Chairman might endorse another candidate who may come from the MNLF ranks.

*While I was still in Manila, I was informed by an MNLF official by telephone from Jolo that there was another meeting called with over a hundred MNLF leaders including Ulama (Religious Leaders) in attendance. The issue of the candidacy of the MNLF Chairman in the ARMM election was again discussed and when put to a vote, the decision was unanimous: The MNLF Chairman should accept the GRP offer.*

**July 8.** This was the last day of registration for the ARMM elections. MNLF leaders from Jolo called up our office in Manila to report

about certain problems in registration encountered by the COMELEC officials. In the early afternoon, the MNLF Secretariat in Manila received a fax report from the MNLF Chairman of Sulu saying that the registration was a failure because there was low turnout.

The Office of Secretary Torres called up to inquire about the progress of the registration. The MNLF Secretariat told him about the reports received from the MNLF. At about 4 o'clock, Sec. Torres called up to verify. The MNLF Secretariat also told him about the low turnout. He said, "Abet, the MNLF will miss the chance to participate". I suggested to Secretary Torres that he should call the Chairman in Jolo while there was still time. He called and whatever he told the MNLF Chairman the result was that the latter decided to register as a voter in the town of Jolo in late afternoon.<sup>39</sup> At about 6 o'clock, the MNLF Chairman called me from Jolo to inform him that Secretary Torres was coming to Jolo. He told this me to come with Sec. Torres and also to inform the MNLF Chief of Staff Yusop Jikiri and MNLF Secretary General Mus Sema to come to Jolo.

With Chairman Misuari already a registered voter, the decision to accept the offer for him to run as candidate for ARMM Governor was not difficult to make.

Early morning of July 9, we were on an executive jet bound for Jolo. There were seven of us in the plane: there was me, Sec. Torres, Political Affairs Secretary Claudio, COMELEC Commissioner Gorospe, an aide of Sec. Torres, Gen. Jikiri, and MNLF Sec. Gen. Mus Sema who joined the party in Zamboanga City.

Upon arrival, the party proceeded immediately to Timbangan where the MNLF Chairman and the MNLF leaders were waiting. The MNLF Chairman had a one-on-one meeting with Sec. Torres for an hour followed by a short program where the MNLF Chairman introduced Secretary Torres as "The Man of Destiny". The party was back in Manila in the afternoon.

The visit of Sec. Torres finally sealed the decision for the MNLF Chairman to run as candidate for ARMM Governor. The offer of government was for him to run and the Ramos Administration will see to it that he would run unopposed. In addition, he would be allowed to choose from a list of probable candidates to become his running mate. President Ramos presented this idea to the Mindanao leaders to ensure that Chairman Misuari would run un-opposed as

the official candidate of the Lakas-NUCD-UMDP.

In the early morning of July 11, I went back to Jolo in an executive jet with two Malacanang officials for a meeting with the MNLF Chairman. The party arrived while Misuari was having a meeting with the MNLF and some political leaders. On that occasion and in the presence of MNLF leaders, the MNLF Chairman signed the Certificate of Candidacy and the nomination issued by the Lakas Party. He also selected his running mate from a list of two names. The first was Dimas Pundato, a Maranao, member of the MNLF Top 90 (The original 90 founders of the MNLF), became MNLF Vice-Chairman and then the Executive Director of Office of Muslims Affairs. The second was Guimid "Jimmy" Matalam, from Maguindanao, son of the late Cotabato Governor Udtog Matalam who founded the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM), Speaker of the ARMM Legislative Assembly. His choice was Matalam.

The following day (July 12), the last day for filing of the certificate of candidacy, Speaker Jose De Venecia, Sec. Torres, and Sec. Claudio were in Jolo to proclaim the candidacy of the MNLF Chairman. His certificate of candidacy was then officially filed with the local COMELEC. Immediately, he became candidate Nur Misuari. This new development had implications on his status as Chairman of the MNLF, which was then technically an enemy of the state being still a rebel organization. Even the GRP felt that the situation could not be allowed to stay long. It added a sense of urgency to the peace talks. Ramos wrote later that "time was of the essence...if a final agreement could not be signed before the ARMM election on September 9, and assuming that Chairman Misuari would win the ARMM Governorship—we would be confronted with an absurd, yet entirely probable situation of having to continue to negotiate with a local official of our own Government!"<sup>40</sup>

The effect to the MNLF was different. The candidacy of the MNLF Chairman in the ARMM had diminished whatever political leverage the MNLF had, if there was any, in the remaining unresolved issues. The settlement on the political issues became a foregone conclusion in favor of the GRP.

Ramos sent a letter to the OIC Secretary General dated July 8, 1996 "expressing deep appreciation and gratitude to the OIC Secretary General for the indispensable leadership and support

extended...particularly towards ensuring the success of the 8<sup>th</sup> GRP-MNLF Mixed Committee Meeting in the Philippines, June 21-23, 1996. The 8<sup>th</sup> MC hurdled the formidable impasse on the agenda item of the “transitional implementing structure and mechanism.” This accomplishment paved the way for a complete settlement of the political issues surrounding the negotiation, initially through the installation of a Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and later through the setting up of a new autonomous region in accord with Philippine constitutional processes.<sup>41</sup>

The OIC, on the other hand, responded positively to the candidacy of the Chairman. They issued a press statement from Jeddah on July 18, which the MNLF Secretariat released in Manila on the same day saying, “the Secretary-General has expressed his best wishes for the success of Prof. Nur Misuari, Chairman of the MNLF, in the gubernatorial elections for which he had been nominated by the MNLF hierarchy...and hopes that the MNLF’s historic decision will consolidate the mutual confidence of the fraternal people of Southern Philippines.”<sup>42</sup>

Muslim political leaders were also drawn into the idea of giving support to the candidacy of Chairman Misuari in the ARMM. Former Sulu Governor Tupay Loong,<sup>43</sup> speaking on behalf of his political allies and supporters, met with me and Ustadz Abdulbaki Abubakar and requested to send a message to the MNLF Chairman. The idea was for Misuari to move for a ‘Free Zone’ to minimize problems in the conduct of the campaign and the election itself. This election, he said, should produce leaders, regardless of party affiliations, whether MNLF or not, who would support the leadership of Chairman Misuari in the ARMM. This arrangement, he added, would show that the MNLF Chairman’s brand of politics was really new and revolutionary—allowing the MNLF to rise above partisan politics. I presented this unsolicited suggestion to the MNLF Chairman but it did not get any positive response.

Meanwhile, as the campaign activities for the ARMM went into high gear, I returned to my Secretariat work in preparation for the Final Round of Talks in Jakarta.

On July 9, the Working Group established in the 8<sup>th</sup> MCM met in the Indonesian Embassy. The issue of the number of MNLF forces

joining the PNP was discussed. The GRP Panel headed by Secretary Aguirre agreed to increase the number from 1,000 to 1,500 "provided that the joining process will start upon the establishment of the SPCPD".<sup>44</sup> The MNLF representatives headed by Rev. Cerveza maintained that it should be 20,000, as the MNLF Chairman demanded earlier in Davao City. The issue was not resolved.

On the MNLF forces joining the AFP, the GRP Panel proposed 5,500 personnel. With 1,500 for the PNP, the total should reach 7,000 MNLF forces to be integrated to the AFP and PNP. The issue was not also resolved.

The contentious items included, in addition to the number of forces, the mode of entry for the MNLF. The MNLF Panel proposed that the joining of MNLF forces would be done as a unit and not on an individual basis. The GRP Panel requested time to review the proposal thoroughly.

The Working Group met again in the Indonesian Embassy on July 29 where they agreed at the suggestion of the GRP Panel, to delete the word "religious" before "Darul Iftah" (House of Islamic Fatwa) in order to be consistent with the constitutional provision of the separation of Church and State; and enumerated the "Appropriate Agencies Referred to in Paragraph 5 of the Davao City Consensus." But both parties did not reach consensus on the issue of integration of MNLF to the AFP and PNP as "the MNLF Panel expressed dissatisfaction on the number and modality proposed by the GRP."

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Because of this difficulty in resolving certain issues on the subject of MNLF integration, top-level delegations of GRP and OIC officials had to go to Jolo to meet with the MNLF Chairman on July 31, 1996.

The delegation was composed of Ambassador Yan, Sec. Torres, Congressman Ermita, Sec. Aguirre, DND Undersecretary Gacis, Ambassador Rajab, Ambassador Hartono, and Dr. Hassan, Chairman of the Mixed Committee Meeting. They met with the MNLF Chairman at the MSU Campus in Jolo. This top-level meeting resulted in what they called the "Jolo Understanding" the contents of which were drafted by Undersecretary Gacis for the guidance of the GRP-MNLF working Group.

Then the Working Group met again on August 16 at the Indonesian Embassy where they discussed the joining of the MNLF Forces into the PNP and the setting up of security detail for the Officials of the SPCPD; and the “Jolo Understanding” presented by Undersecretary Gacis as contained in the letter of DND Secretary Renato De Villa addressed to GRP Panel Chairman Ambassador Yan. The contents of the said letter which incorporated the results of the “Jolo Understanding” were presented by Undersecretary Gacis as the final position of the GRP Panel on the issue of MNLF integration.<sup>46</sup>

In the words of Ambassador Hartono, “The accomplishments of the work of the Working Group mark a high point of the sustained goodwill and accommodation of the GRP and the MNLF Panels.”<sup>47</sup>

Earlier (August 1), I had attended, as an observer and upon invitation of Secretary Torres, the Senate Hearing conducted by the Committee of the Whole on the RP Government-MNLF Peace Negotiations. The GRP Panel headed by Ambassador Yan and Secretary Torres were called to make their respective presentations. Similar senate hearings were also conducted in Zamboanga City and Cotabato City.

But these Senate hearings were dominated by leading opposition Senators who were “associated with the most vocal opponents of the proposed SPCPD. The issue was used as a political weapon against the Ramos Administration.”<sup>48</sup> The hearings therefore resulted in the Senate urging the GRP Panel to introduce amendments in the Davao consensus for inclusion in the Final Agreement. “The overall thrust of the amendments was to dilute the powers and autonomy of the MNLF at the helm of the SPCPD.”<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, President Ramos, encouraged by the progress of the negotiations, invited the MNLF Chairman to join him in Olongapo City. But when I talked to the Chairman over the phone from the Senate he declined the invitation because he was not feeling well and wanted to rest from the exhaustive meetings he attended the last few days.

On August 16, Secretary Torres again requested me to relay the invitation of President Ramos for a meeting with Chairman Misuari in Malabang, Lanao del Sur. The President and the First Lady were in Brunei attending a royal wedding at the invitation of His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. Accordingly, President Ramos wanted to

get back home by entering the country through Cotabato City. This act would be symbolic of the role that Mindanao would play in the future, no longer to be seen as the “southern backdoor” but as a front door to the tiger economies of Southeast Asia. He would like to cap this historic entry by meeting with the MNLF Chairman who was then still technically “an enemy of the state.” This meeting between “two former enemies” would symbolically usher an era of peace for Mindanao and the country as whole.

I called the MNLF Chairman in Jolo from the Office of Sec. Torres and told him about the invitation. He was reluctant to make a positive response saying that the MNLF leaders who were then meeting in Timbangan were not supportive of the idea. “It would appear as if I were surrendering to the Government by meeting President Ramos at this time,” he said. I told him that, on the contrary, this was the best time to meet with the President. He was still the Chairman of the MNLF. Their meeting would be very significant and would help accelerate the final pace of the peace process. If he were to wait for the time when he was already ARMM Governor, then their meeting would have less significance to the Peace Process. After consulting the MNLF leaders present, he finally agreed to accept the invitation.

### **The Ramos-Misuari Meeting in Malabang**

On August 19, *President Ramos and MNLF Chairman Misuari met in Malabang, Lanao del Sur*. “It was a high point in the entire peace process,” President Ramos would write later.<sup>50</sup> The last time the two men met was 10 years ago in a Carmelite Convent in Jolo, Sulu. Then AFP Chief of Staff Lt. General Fidel Ramos escorted then President Aquino in a meeting with MNLF Chairman Misuari on September 5, 1986.

This time, the MNLF Chairman traveled by sea from Jolo to Cotabato City and then to Malabang. President Ramos was coming from a trip to Brunei at the invitation of His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

To the MNLF leaders, particularly the MNLF Chairman, Malabang was a historic place. According to written and oral MNLF literatures, it was from this town that Prof. Misuari and some of his colleagues who constituted the so called “Top 90” clandestinely left

by small *kumpit* (small engine-powered boat) towards the direction of Sabah and finally to a training camp in Pulau Pangkor, Malaysia. After one year of military and political training and having founded the MNLF, they came back to the country through this small and quiet town of Malabang. Some residents who knew about this event would recall that historic event with a sense of pride. The town was dominated by Maranao and Maguindanao Muslims and a small number of families from Sulu. From this town, the MNLF began to spread through the whole of Mindanao to challenge the might of the AFP and the Martial Law government of the late President Marcos.

To President Ramos, “the Malabang peace rally was a joyous occasion for all—symbolic indeed of long-separated brothers and sisters of one family.”<sup>51</sup>

To me, it was an MNLF journey that had gone full circle. They ended the journey where they began. A journey that cost the lives of 200,000 people (including my parents) ended in a peace rally with the highest official of the land, a General-turned-President. Chairman Misuari probably had his own personal interpretation of that historic return trip to Malabang.

Nevertheless, the meeting was indeed a historic one. It attracted the attention of the world. It was broadcast live internationally. Indeed, it was the highest point in the peace process. I was glad to have played a crucial role in arranging it, though failed to join President Ramos and Chairman Misuari and other cabinet members and MNLF leaders in that small room of the Principal of that Elementary School in Malabang where they held that symbolic meeting. Security was tight and I decided not to squeeze my way in.

Back in Manila (August 21), the Office of the Press Secretary called me, at the instruction of the President, who wanted me to be present in the President’s Press Conference in Malacanang. It was the celebration of the 13<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of the late Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr. In that occasion, the President introduced me to the media as “our friend from the MNLF”. He proudly talked about his historic meeting with Chairman Misuari in Malabang and the peace rally that followed. He invited me to help in the information drive to inform the people about the dawning of peace in Mindanao.

And so the byword of the time was “Peace.”



## The Fourth and Final Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta: August 28-30, 1996

In the words of Indonesian Foreign Minister Alatas, this final meeting in Jakarta in search of that elusive peace in Mindanao was a “rendezvous with history.”<sup>52</sup> Who would not want to be part of history?

The MNLF Panel then came with 154 members. Aside from the MNLF officials and leaders, there were six (6) Christian leaders including Ilaga Commander Inday Ligaya;<sup>53</sup> nine (9) Leaders from the Highlander Tribes;<sup>54</sup> and ten (10) Government officials including Sarangani Governor Priscilla Chiongbian, General Santos City Mayor Rosalita Nunez, and Puerto Princesa Mayor Edward Hagedorn.

The GRP Panel headed by Ambassador Yan came with 42 members. Secretary Torres and Senator Orlando Mercado came as advisers. In addition, 10 members of the House of Representatives also came “to rendezvous with history.”

The same members of the OIC and the Indonesian Delegations came.

*The Mixed Committee Meeting and the Working Groups.* On the first day, August 28, the 9<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting was convened. The Committee decided to organize three Working Groups to work on three important issues as follows:

- |                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Working Group I   | : | Joining of MNLF Forces with the AFP/<br>PNP                               |
| Working Group II  | : | Participating of the OIC Monitoring<br>Team during the transition period. |
| Working Group III | : | Drafting of the Final Agreement   |

The output of the Working Groups were submitted to the Mixed Committee Chairman and presented to the Plenary for the Formal Talks, which began on the second day, August 29.

During the session of Working Group I, Chairman Misuari emphasized the following:<sup>55</sup>

- Upon integration, MNLF officers should be eligible to the highest hierarchy in the AFP. Promising MNLF military leaders therefore should also be given opportunities to make up through in-service trainings
- OIC countries should extend MNLF military leaders admission in their

military academies, so as to accelerate the MNLF men upon entry into the AFP.

Ambassador Mohsin took the occasion to remind the parties not to overlook the elements other than the MNLF who are not party to the settlement” (referring to the MILF and other Muslim groups). Chairman Misuari responded by saying, “the MNLF is the sole representative of the Moro people.” And Ambassador Mohsin reiterated his suggestion by saying, “the GRP and the MNLF should take all efforts to bring these factions together with the MNLF.”<sup>56</sup>

Working Group II also discussed some remaining issues on Economics, and Financial Systems, Mines and Minerals particularly on the areas of taxes, banking, and the establishment of economic zones. But these were just confined to the use of appropriate words and phrases in the Draft agreement.<sup>57</sup>

For the Working Group III, Secretary Aguirre headed the GRP Panel and Reverend Cerveza headed the MNLF Panel. They reviewed the draft of the Final Agreement but decided to elevate to the Mixed Committee the portions on Shariah and Judiciary, Separability Clause, Totality Clause, Effective Clause and the format of the signing.<sup>58</sup>

*Sessions in the Formal Talks.* In his speech during the Opening Ceremony, Minister Alatas revealed that the breakthrough in the negotiations came about with the GRP’s formulation of the Transitional Implementing Structure (which became the SPCPD), which got a positive response from Indonesia and the OIC during the Special OIC Consultative Meeting in Jakarta in early June 1996.<sup>59</sup>

Ambassador Yan said:<sup>60</sup>

Throughout the entire negotiations, we have had both difficult and happy times. There were days of contention and days of accommodations, days of challenge and days of ease. All of them have become great lessons for us... One of these great lessons is that peace, indeed, is a most difficult pursuit in the midst of decades and even centuries of misunderstanding, prejudice and inequity. Secondly, however, we have shown that sincerity, persistence and perseverance –coupled with courage and sacrifice – can effectively defeat the dark forces of conflict; ... with the higher national interest in mind, an honorable peace is not hard to find...among commonly-minded adversaries and earnest allies in the world.

Chairman Misuari took the opportunity to introduce the members of the MNLF delegation who came “practically from all major walks of life in our Homeland, representing not only the Muslims but also

Christian and Highlander communities in Mindanao.” He concluded by saying, “Peace to us is the greatest gift or legacy we can bequeath to our people and posterity and to the larger humanity. And with peace, Insha-Allah (God willing), we shall have a just and prosperous society, consistent with the dignity of man as the greatest creation of the Almighty God.”<sup>61</sup>

In his Opening Remarks, Ambassador Mohsin noted the “positive effects of consultations and intensive dialogues with the two Panels on various levels conducted since the Third Round of Formal talks” which he “considered something unique in the long history of conflict in Southern Philippines.”<sup>62</sup>

In the plenary session that followed at about noontime, “two critical issues” were considered: 1) the continuing role of the OIC during the transitional period; and 2) the question of revenue sharing.<sup>63</sup> But the session adjourned without reaching any agreement. The “MEETING OF THE HEADS OF PANELS” had to be called at about 2:30 in the afternoon to resolve these issues.

The other important issues resolved by this “Meeting of the Heads of Panels” were:<sup>64</sup>

- A formulation that “The Regional Legislative Assembly of the Area of Autonomy shall establish Shariah Courts in accordance with the existing laws (This became Para 152 in the final version of the Peace Agreement)
- No “Separability Clause” in the Agreement
- On the “Totality Clause” both Panels agreed to the formulation of Para 155 (This became Para 153 in the final version of the Peace Agreement).

### **The Initialing of the Peace Agreement: Merdeka Palace, Jakarta; August 30, 1996**

The Initialing Ceremony of the Final Peace Agreement took place at the Merdeka Palace where all the parties gathered together in the presence of His Excellency, President Suharto.

In his speech, President Suharto said:<sup>65</sup>

This is a moment of great significance not only to the Government and people of the Philippines but also to the whole region and the international community... the peaceful solution to the conflict in Southern Philippines would be a positive contribution towards ASEAN’s efforts to establish a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), an aspiration that it

has held since its inception in 1971.

With the solution of the conflict in Southern Philippines, the window of opportunity that has been opened by the development of the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), which covers the southern part of the Philippines and the eastern part of Indonesia, grows wider and becomes even more promising.

The peaceful solution to the conflict in the Southern Philippines could serve to prove before the international community that conflicts within regions could be solved by the region or the community of nations concerned using only their own resources, their creativity and their determination to achieve peace. In fact, I would not be surprised if analysts of international politics would see in the peace process in the Southern Philippines valuable lessons with possibly some applicability elsewhere.

### **The Signing of the Peace Agreement: Malacanang Palace, Manila; September 2, 1996.**

The signing of the Peace Agreement took place in Malacanang Palace, Manila on September 2, 1996 in the presence of His Excellency, President Fidel V. Ramos.

In his speech, Ramos said:<sup>66</sup>

With the formal signing of this Final Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), we bring to a close almost 30 years of conflict, at the cost of more than 120,000 Filipino lives.

Today, we launch a new era of peace and development for the Southern Philippines, and for the Philippines as a whole...break not the peace...

The OIC Secretary General, His Excellency Dr. Hamid Al-Gabid also said:<sup>67</sup>

Today, we seal the final act of the long way we have covered to reach a just, honorable and durable peace in Mindanao. We thank Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala, for having granted us, in His infinite mercy, success in this difficult mission, which has seen arduous, long and protracted negotiations stretching for more than a quarter of a century.

Then Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas declared:

With the signing...of the Final Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front, an arduous quest for peace that has lasted more than two decades has

come to a splendid close.

But Minister Alatas cautioned:

The real hard work begins after the signing of the Agreement. For a Peace Agreement...does not implement itself: it assumes concrete reality only on the accretion of activities completed, the solid achievements, contributions, cooperation and often inevitable sacrifices by all those who are supposed to make it work.

Finally, Chairman Misuari said:<sup>68</sup>

Peace is not merely an end by itself, however important it is. But it is also an excellent means towards a higher end. It is here we find ourselves: how to make peace an instrument to another end or purpose...it is here where the SPCPD lies...where the ARMM lies.

...We can best make use of these two apparatuses of administration or governance to meet the expectations of the people. Certainly, we have to warn people not to expect too much, considering the built-in handicaps of these two. But then this is not an excuse either not to maximize our efforts and the utilization of both the SPCPD and the ARMM to carry out our sacred objectives.

My "Inside Story" coverage of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks ends here. But the history of peace building in Moroland has just begun.

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## Endnotes Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> The Kamlon uprising in Sulu took place from 1951 to 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p.78.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of the Mindanao Alliance for Peace signed by Mr. Sammy Mandas, Secretary General, dated February 14, 1996 inviting the MNLF and GRP Panels for consultation-dialogue with the people.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Sulu commission for Peace signed by Prof. Samsula Adju, Chairman, addressed to the GRP and MNLF Panels dated February 19, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Letter of the Philippine Independent Peace Advocates (PIPA) signed by Teresita Quintos Deles, Secretary General addressed to the GRP, MNLF, the Indonesian Ambassador and

the Libyan Ambassador, dated February 7, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Soliman M. Santos, Jr. "The Philippine-Muslim Dispute: International Aspects From Origins to Resolution, The role of the OIC in the Peace Negotiations between the GRP and the MNLF," a Research Paper in International Dispute Resolution in the Master of Laws Program at the University of Melbourne, Australia, January 1999. P 35.

<sup>10</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Chairman of the 7<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, Zamboanga City, March 1-2, 1996 (MNLF Secretariat File) p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Chairman of the 7<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, Zamboanga City, March 1-2, 1996 (MNLF Secretariat File).

<sup>14</sup> Ramos, "Break Not The Peace..." p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher to President Ramos dated March 11, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> According to Atty. Soliman M. Santos, Jr. of the Philippine Independent Peace Advocate.

<sup>17</sup> From the files of Atty. Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

<sup>18</sup> Letter of Alejandro Melchor, III to the author dated March 26, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Peter G. Growing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899-1920*, Quezon City, 1983, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp.148-163.

<sup>21</sup> Ramos, *Break not the Peace...* p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War.*, New York: Doubleday, 1995, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ramos, *Break not the Peace...* p. 85

<sup>26</sup> Atty. Soliman M. Santos, Jr. conducted an interview with Ambassador Rajab in Makati on December 22, 1998 which he quoted in his research paper in International Dispute Resolution in the Master of Laws Program at the University of Melbourne, Australia, "The Philippines-Muslim Dispute: From Origins to Resolution", The Role of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in the Peace Negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), January 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of Ambassador Hartono to Brig. Gen. Kivlan Zen, Commander of the OIC Observer Team, Zamboanga City dated June 11, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> MNLF Secretariat letter to Hon. Mayor Rodrigo Duterte, Davao City, dated June 11, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Opening Statements made by Dr. Hassan Wirajuda of Indonesia, Chairman of the 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City, June 21, 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Opening Statement of H.E. Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman of the GRP Panel, 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, June 21, 1996, Davao City.

- <sup>31</sup> Opening Statement, MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City, June 21, 1996.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Report of the Chairman of the 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City, June 20-23, 1996, p. 4. MNLF Secretariat File.
- <sup>34</sup> Closing Statement of H.E. Ambassador Manuel Yan, Chairman, GRP Panel, 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, Davao City, June 23, 1996.
- <sup>35</sup> Closing Statement of MNLF Chairman Misuari, 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, June 23, 1996, Davao City.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Closing Statement of H.E. Ambassador Muhammad Mohsin, Assistant Secretary General of the OIC, 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, June 23, 1996, Davao City.
- <sup>38</sup> Closing Statement of H.E. Ambassador Rajab Azzarouq of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, 8<sup>th</sup> Mixed Committee Meeting, June 23, 1996, Davao City.
- <sup>39</sup> See also Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p 94.
- <sup>40</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 93.
- <sup>41</sup> Ramos, Letter to the Secretary General Hamid Algabid, Organization of the Islamic Conference, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, dated July 8, 1996.
- <sup>42</sup> OIC Press Statement, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, July 18, 1996.
- <sup>43</sup> Tupay Loong is from Parang, Sulu. He was an MNLF Commander but returned to the folds of Government in 1973 with some local MNLF leaders. His group came to be called by then President Marcos as the "Magic 8" Leaders of Sulu. They were given political and economic concessions. Loong became Mayor of Parang and was eventually elected Governor of Sulu. At this time, the 1995 electoral contest in Sulu between him and Sakur Tan was not decided yet. In the 1998 election, he lost to Sakur Tan.
- <sup>44</sup> Letter-Report of Ambassador Abu Hartono, Chairman of the Working Group, addressed to the GRP, MNLF and OIC Committee of Six dated July 15, 1995.
- <sup>45</sup> Report of the GRP-MNLF Working Group on the Joining of the MNLF Forces with the AFP/PNP, dated August 23 and submitted by its Chairman, Indonesian Ambassador Abu Hartono, to the 9<sup>th</sup> GRP-MNLF Mixed Committee Meeting held on August 28, 1996, Jakarta, Indonesia..
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Atty. Soliman M. Santos, Jr., "The Philippine Peace Process, Party Politics and Constitutional Change", A paper prepared for a Sri Lankan Parliamentarian Seminar sponsored by International Alert on 18 April 1997 at Hotel Danarra, Quezon City.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 92.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 93.
- <sup>52</sup> H.E. Ali Alatas, Foreign Minister of Indonesia and Chairman, OIC Ministerial committee of Six, "Opening Statement," Final Round of GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, Jakarta, Indonesia,

August 29, 1996.

- <sup>53</sup> The Ilaga was a Christian Vigilante group organized in the early 1970's to fight against the Muslims. Commander Ligaya herself confessed to have killed many Muslims. But during consultations held by the MNLF in Mindanao, she and her 70,000 members (she claimed) expressed support to the MNLF position in the Peace Talks. She even stayed in my residence in Manila on several occasions.
- <sup>54</sup> Highlanders refer to the non-Muslim natives of Mindanao.
- <sup>55</sup> Executive Summary, Fourth Round of Formal Talks, August 28-30, 1996, Jakarta, Indonesia. Para. 20 and 23.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, Para 24-26.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, Para 61-64.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid, Para 65-70.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid, Para 83.
- <sup>60</sup> Ambassador Manuel Yan, Opening Statement, 4<sup>th</sup> Round of Formal Talks, Jakarta, Indonesia, August 29, 1996.
- <sup>61</sup> MNLF Chairman Misuari, Opening Statement, 4<sup>th</sup> Round of Formal Talks, Jakarta, Indonesia, August 29, 1996.
- <sup>62</sup> Executive Summary... Para 94.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid, Para 101.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid, Para 133-135.
- <sup>65</sup> President Suharto, Speech delivered at the Initialing Ceremony of the Peace Agreement, Merdeka Palace, Jakarta, August 30, 1996.
- <sup>66</sup> Ramos, "Break Not The Peace: 'We are all victors,'" Speech delivered during the signing of the Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, September 2, 1996.
- <sup>67</sup> Dr. Hamid Algabid, OIC Secretary General, Speech delivered at the signing of the Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, September 2, 1996
- <sup>68</sup> MNLF Chairman Misuari, Speech delivered during the signing of the Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, September 2, 1996





## Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations



With MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari in Timbangan,  
Indanan, Sulu. The chairman was reviewing  
the draft Press Statements prepared by Abet.  
Sometime in May 1994.

In Chapter 1, I reviewed the historical context that framed the Mindanao conflict. I referred to the work of noted scholars such as O.D. Corpuz, Cesar Majul, Peter Gowing, and others to demonstrate that the GRP-MNLF conflict took centuries in the making, rooted as it was in historical processes identified with colonization, and finally crystallized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the formation of the MNLF as catalyzed by the Jabidah Massacre. In Chapters 2 to 6, the main bulk of this text, I attempted to provide a personal account of the years in which I worked with the principal players whose negotiations led to the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement. I especially attempted to give a glimpse of the things that happen behind the scenes during negotiations, particularly with regards to this entire process of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks. In this chapter, I aim to provide a brief analysis of the Peace Talks, formulate my conclusions about the situation in Southern Philippines, and put forward some recommendations particularly oriented towards the question of national security.

The bases of my analysis are the key concepts in Principled Negotiation, Conflict Resolution, and Mediation. I use these to read the process—that is, the manner and style—by which the two parties to the conflict (GRP and the MNLF) handled the negotiations. Another important angle in the negotiation was the active participation of a third-party, the OIC. This is what Zartman and Touval call the “triangular relationship” in mediation.<sup>1</sup> For most of this chapter, I will be quoting directly from *Selected Readings On Conflict Resolution, Principled Negotiation, Crisis Management and Brinkmanship*, copyright owned by Professor Ma. J. Lopez of the Coverdale Organization.

## Analysis

In Chapter 2, I related how the GRP and the MNLF prepared for the talks. This is what both parties called the exploratory period. This is where you needed to “prepare what you want...decide what you want (value) and prioritize what you want.”<sup>2</sup> This is also where you do your best to “clarify the overall framework.”<sup>3</sup>

President Ramos first outlined his programs in his first State-of-the Nation Address delivered in July 27, 1993 where he announced a policy of peace and reconciliation with all armed groups, without

any preconditions as to the status of their armed and political activities.<sup>4</sup> This policy was very clearly defined in a Memorandum he issued to the GRP Panel dated August 26, 1992, which contained Principles, Objectives, Agenda, and Agenda Principles.<sup>5</sup>

In order to “find out what the other side’s *interests* are” one must “check for these behind the *positions* that they iterate and recognize valid and legitimate interests.”<sup>6</sup> President Ramos initiated moves to contact the MNLF. One such move involved Congressmen Ermita and Jaafar’s first meeting with me, which ultimately led to the holding of two Exploratory Talks. Even earlier than that, President Ramos had already made contacts with Libya before he even became President.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the MNLF also had its own way of preparing for a possible resumption of talks with the GRP as consistently called for by the OIC in its various resolutions. They had a very clear agenda in mind: negotiations on autonomy based on the Tripoli Agreement under the auspices of the OIC in a mutually agreed foreign venue. All of these were made clear to Congressman Ermita in that first meeting.

With these initial preparations in place, the next important thing was *communication*. Even at this early stage and until the end of any negotiation, the most important element is communication. It is important to “conduct communication productively...communicate clearly, concisely and without exaggeration... knowing that not only the content is important, but also how it is said and when it is said.”<sup>8</sup> And if I were to add to this basic tool of negotiation based on personal experience as related in this story, I would say that the *messenger* also plays a crucial role. In certain delicate cases, the message is clearly and effectively delivered and understood by the other side in the negotiation because of the messenger or the ‘channel’. That was my job, as Special MNLF Peace Emissary, to ensure the correct flow of communications.

At this stage, the OIC’s mediating role was still as “communicator...to act as conduit, opening contacts and carrying messages.” Tact, wording, and sympathy, together with accuracy and confidentiality, are the “necessary character traits of the mediator as communicator.”<sup>9</sup>

The manner of communication should not be in the form of

demand, threat, or warning but by way of an offer.<sup>10</sup> This is very clearly seen in the series of exchange of formal communications between the GRP and the MNLF from start to finish, including GRP communications in the form of *aide memoires* to concerned OIC countries.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to written communications, informal and personal contact is also very vital. There were continued personal contacts between the GRP and the MNLF and also with Ambassadors of concerned OIC countries even when official diplomacy was bogging down. The GRP also encouraged government officials to meet with Chairman Misuari which precisely achieved the effect of effectively “speaking and listening attentively”<sup>12</sup> and directly to him.

These direct personal contacts between parties bring us to another important tool in negotiations called *Presently Perceived Choice Analysis*,<sup>13</sup> also sometimes referred to as “Getting to Yes.” Basically, it involves putting oneself in the shoes/situation of the other side and considering in detail what it will say yes to with regards to the issue being considered for resolution. What is ‘yesable’ can be determined by comparing the benefits and disadvantages of saying “yes” to a given proposal. While I will not discuss this analytical tool in detail here, I mention it to point out that this kind of analysis involves the crucial step of identifying the person on the other side who really exercises the power to make the decision—as well as the extent of that person’s power.

The meetings held by selected officials of the Ramos Administration with Chairman Misuari as related in this story had this effect, which led them “to understand the point of view” of the MNLF Chairman and realize “what factors will cause/influence him to make a decision.”<sup>14</sup> Even in the early stage (1993) of the talks, President Ramos, more than any one else, was aware of the critical role of the MNLF Chairman in the outcome of the talks. He would write later, “the credibility of the peace process rested largely on our success in persuading Chairman Misuari himself to come to the negotiating table, since he was the recognized symbol of resistance in the region.”<sup>15</sup>

Communication should not only be limited between and among the players in the negotiations but also with their respective constituencies. The matter of communicating to the public through

the media or other forms of communication such as consultations became a very important issue in the talks. It in fact became an important feature in the negotiations so that at the end of every GRP-MNLF meetings, a Joint Press Statement was always prepared and issued to the media in order to avoid media controversy. Admittedly, both sides knew the dynamics of the Philippine press and could not avoid talking to the media separately. I actually had to assume the role of Spokesman for the MNLF in 1994.

In addition, there were other sectors that demanded transparency in the talks. Some were motivated by certain political interests and the people in general were moved by the felt need for correct information on what was happening. The GRP responded to these demands through public consultations, dialogues, hearings and summits with all concerned leaders in addition to the official public pronouncements issued every now and then by concerned government agencies. The MNLF also held a series of consultations in various places in Mindanao including Palawan. Not to be missed was the diplomatic community in Manila, particularly the Embassies of the United States and Japan, who had shown sustained interest in the negotiations. I had meetings, almost on a monthly basis, with representatives of foreign embassies, to update them on the progress of the talks.

All of these actions added up to what Ambassador Yan referred to as the formation of a wide constituency of peace advocates in Mindanao and the country as a whole and in the global peace network as evidenced by the expression of support from the international community that poured in towards the end of 1995.

Another important element in negotiations is the matter of *authority*. On the GRP side, this was very clear: the Office of the President is the highest authority of the land. But even then, the MNLF Chairman “inquired from the Chairman of the Plenary Session the extent of authority of the GRP Panel” at the start of the First Round of Formal Talks in Jakarta. Because “negotiating authority may be given in various degrees and it is always helpful to check out early in the negotiation (or even before the negotiation) the extent of the other side’s negotiating authority.”<sup>16</sup> On the MNLF side, its credentials were clear regardless of what the detractors would tell the President.<sup>17</sup> The MNLF was officially recognized by the OIC as

the “sole and legitimate representative of the Bangsamoro People.”<sup>18</sup> And since the GRP recognized the role of the OIC in the talks,<sup>19</sup> the GRP had to deal with the MNLF in resolving the autonomy issue in Southern Philippines.

President Ramos talks of “integrative negotiation,” which, according to him, is “the classic model of constructive, rather than adversarial encounters between parties not necessarily sitting across each other, but standing alongside each other in viewing the horizon of possibilities.”<sup>20</sup>

This is what is referred to as *Principled Negotiation*, “the paradigm of rationality and realistic problem-solving” developed by the Harvard Negotiation Project and the Coverdale Organization.<sup>21</sup> The opposite of this type of negotiation is the traditional one called *Positional Bargaining*.

Principled Negotiation is a communication process in which both sides invest for mutual gain<sup>22</sup> and the participants are problem-solvers. This is what the Support Committees, the Mixed Committee and the Joint Ceasefire Committee did and even in the level of the Formal Talks as always emphasized by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. And this problem-solving activity even went beyond the confines of the negotiating table. GRP and MNLF officials with the participation of Muslim Ambassadors (particularly Ambassador Rajab) did not hesitate to sit together to come up with strategies on how to help solve peace-and-order situations like kidnapping and clan feuds in the area.

“Separate the people from the problem and be soft on the people and hard on the problem.” The MNLF and GRP Panels, including the mediators, could still dine, be friendly, and share jokes with one another even after going through difficult and heated discussions on certain issues. President Ramos considered this as one of the “Lessons Learned” in the talks because “as friendships broadened and deepened, so did the will to push forward to win the peace.”<sup>23</sup>

I experienced this myself. In the course of the negotiations, I had developed high respect for certain GRP officials including those in the AFP and PNP for their sense of professionalism and concern. I believed the feeling was mutual, as the parties gradually developed what became known as Confidence-Building Measures (CBM).

In principled negotiation, “bottom line is avoided.” The GRP

obviously had no bottom line except the principle of Constitutional Process that guarantees “the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic.” The MNLF, on the other hand, finally showed flexibility in the matter of the establishment of the Provisional Government, the most contentious issue in the talks. As the GRP showed flexibility by way of trying to “explore the constitutional universe,” it finally came up with certain options that developed into what became the SPCPD formula. In principled negotiations, the parties “invent options for mutual gain; develop multiple options to choose from.” An example of this is the GRP “two-track” approach.

Finally, as principled negotiation “is a paradigm of rationality,” the parties “apply reason and are open to reasons; they yield to principle and not to pressure.” In the course of the talks, there were several instances when certain issues became intractable, but as one party persisted with logical arguments, the other party yielded.

Below is a schematic overview of the concept of negotiation popularized by Howard Raiffa in his book, *The Art and Science of Negotiation*.

Based on this schematic, I believe that the negotiators in the GRP-

STRIDENT ANTAGONIST	COOPERATIVE PARTNERS	FULLY COOPERATIVE PARTNERS
Malevolent and untrustworthy	They recognize that both parties have different interests and also some common ones	Completely trusting
Their promises are suspicious	Open to compromise but are well aware that each party will pursue their own interest first and foremost	Expects/provides total honesty, disclosure
Double-crossers	Neither malevolent or altruistic	Consider selves as an entity and pursue the best for the entity
They exploit power to the fullest	Slightly distrustful	
	Expect others to pursue foremost their own interests and indulge in strategic posturing	
	Not confident and others will be honest but would like themselves to be so	
	Expect power to be used gracefully and all sides to abide by law and honor all joint agreements	



MNLF Talks, including the mediators/facilitators from the OIC, fall under the category of *cooperative partners*. They recognized that both parties had different interests and also some common ones.

The original position of the MNLF was complete independence<sup>24</sup> but it was scaled down to autonomy when they agreed to sign the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. Beneath this autonomy formula was the core value of the MNLF struggle: the preservation of Islamic culture and tradition. From the very beginning, President Ramos already recognized these interests. The GRP approach was “based on the assumption that all positions and courses of action being contemplated by the Government would be consistent with Islamic values.”<sup>25</sup>

In contrast, the MNLF was cautious and sometimes intractable in the beginning refusing even to consider as part of the agenda any reference to the ARMM and other related implementations claimed by the Government to be in accord with the Tripoli Agreement. On many occasions, the MNLF declared its non-recognition of the Philippines’ laws and its Constitution. Later on, however, the MNLF allowed the GRP to take all the necessary constitutional processes as long as the Tripoli Agreement was implemented in letter and spirit. And in the final phase, no less than the MNLF Chairman took the radical step of accepting the GRP offer to run as candidate for ARMM Governor in the 1996 regional elections, paving the way for a political compromise that led to the signing of the Agreement.

But reaching this stage in the negotiations was not easy. The OIC, as the mediator, played its part very effectively. *This was very crucial*. In 1976, it was Libya through the good office of the OIC, who assumed the role of “formulator” and came up with the autonomy formula. This time, the GRP, having formulated a proposal (the two-track approach), rested their case with the OIC. The MNLF did the same. This was during the time when the negotiations reached what Zartman and Touval referred to as the “hurting stalemate,” which was mutually felt by both parties.

The OIC then used its leverage. It had a “persuasive power” over the MNLF as seen earlier when they “persuaded” the MNLF to scale down their demand from independence to autonomy in 1976. The OIC’s “persuasive power” was also used to pressure the GRP since 1974 to reach a negotiated political settlement with the MNLF. It

came in the form of various OIC resolutions, OIC visits to the country, and even unconfirmed reports of arm supplies to the MNLF by some OIC member states.

This “persuasive power” of the OIC came with what Zartman and Touval also called “side payment.” It was addressed to both parties in the form of “guarantees or financial aid in accomplishing changes required by the agreement.” This was made very clear by the OIC from the very start of the talks. At the signing of the Peace Agreement in 1996, the OIC officially announced from its Headquarters in Saudi Arabia a financial aid of US\$ 16 Million to help improve health and education facilities in the Autonomous Region. The “side payment” would make the agreement more attractive to both parties.

There is also one important element in the Ramos Peace Initiatives that is close to the heart, the core value, of the MNLF and the Muslims. This is the Ramos *declaration* “to seek a peaceful resolution of armed conflict, with neither blame nor surrender, but with dignity for all.”<sup>26</sup> This was very clearly presented by Congressman Ermita in the First Exploratory Talks in Tripoli Libya. Even the OIC officials keep invoking this principle in their official pronouncements as being consistent with the worldwide call for peace. This is the “Peace of the Brave,” as declared by Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat after signing the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DOP) in Washington, D.C. in the presence of U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Consistent with this policy, the issue of “demobilizing,” “disarming,” or surrender with the issuance of amnesty (as in the time of the late President Marcos) was never in the agenda of the talks because such “issue struck deeply into the honor and prestige of the other party.”<sup>27</sup> I explained this concept to Congressman Ermita in that very first meeting in September 1992.

Ramos also mentioned “legitimacy and ethical conduct” in negotiations as one of the lessons learned. “There is no substitute for candor and straightforwardness brought forward with courtesy, politeness and tact, untainted with personal, bigoted, or condescending undertones. These qualities were abundant in both the GRP and MNLF Panels and infused the negotiation with greater trust and security.”<sup>28</sup> Despite the occurrence of some incidents that threatened to scuttle the talks, such as the Ipil Raid in April 1995 and the movement of AFP troops in certain areas, no one from both

parties ever got close to applying the principle of *brinkmanship*. The principle of brinkmanship was made popular some decades back, by a top US official who advocated going back to the “brink of war” as a negotiating tactic.<sup>29</sup> It is “the deliberate creation of a recognizable risk of war, a risk that one does not completely control...deliberately letting the situation get somewhat out of hand, just because its being out of hand may be intolerable to the other party and force its accommodation.”<sup>30</sup> Contrary to this principle, the MNLF remained faithful to its commitment to “Give Peace a Maximum Chance.”

## Conclusions

Based on the above analysis of the process involved in the negotiations, I have made several conclusions.

1. **Principled Negotiation is the most effective way to resolve conflict with the Muslim rebels.**

Without the benefit of negotiation, the bloody conflict in Mindanao between the GRP and MNLF forces would have continued (as it did from 1972 to 1974) with no hope of settlement. Government policy of attraction, applied unilaterally, failed to address the root causes of the problem. The conflict in fact escalated and reached its peak when the town of Jolo became the scene of bloody fighting in 1974. The AFP may have won the battles but it did not win the war, because there was no war to be won. The Government cannot engage in a war against its own people. It is a violation of the basic principle upon which a government is founded as the Philippine Constitution renounces war as an instrument of National policy.<sup>31</sup>

The solution to the conflict in Mindanao cannot be found in the ruins of the rebels' *kuta* (camp) as Spain and America realized centuries earlier. The military option has already been proven many times in the past as not being the right approach to the resolution of a problem that has its roots in the country's colonial history.

2. **When the conflict reaches a “hurting stalemate” because the two conflicting parties cannot reach an agreement through direct negotiations, as in the situation in 1974, the mediation of a third party mutually acceptable to the two conflicting parties is the best option to resolve the conflict.**

Mediation by the OIC, with Libya as the leading mediating state in 1975,

led to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement. In the 1992-1996 GRP-MNLF negotiations, the parties reached a deadlock on crucial issues even though there was no military fighting in the field because of the Cease-fire Agreement. "Third-party facilitation is indispensable if the parties are poles apart on fundamental political issues," wrote former President Ramos.<sup>32</sup>

3. **The so-called Mindanao Conflict, even though a domestic issue, has regional and international ramifications. Its resolution therefore needs the mediation of a third-party mutually acceptable to the two conflicting parties.**

"Conflicts over politico-security issues take place within a context of power politics, which has a major effect on international mediation."<sup>33</sup> The Mindanao conflict is no doubt a domestic issue. The OIC recognized it as such, as can be gleaned from the various resolutions issued after every OIC meeting. But the conflict has regional and international ramifications. Its effects are felt within the ASEAN (particularly Malaysia and Indonesia) in many forms: refugee problems and border security issues, not to mention the religious dimensions of the conflict. As the MNLF was acknowledged to represent a sizeable Muslim population, the OIC, an international organization of Muslim States, found it consistent with its charter to come in and help resolve the conflict.

The GRP and the MNLF could not have reached an agreement without the participation of a mediating party (a state or an international organization). This is demonstrated by what happened in the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks in 1986. The OIC was not actively involved in that negotiation, and it merely produced a document now recorded as the 1987 Jeddah Accord.

4. **The multi-level approach to negotiation applied in the GRP-MNLF Talks with the active participation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, proved to be effective. This is called the "Triangular relationship" in mediation.**

In the GRP-MNLF negotiations, these modes were applied through the creation of different Technical and Working Committees (Support and Mixed Committees, Joint Cease-fire Committee and Secretariat) supplemented by personal, informal but official contacts not only between the two conflicting parties but also more importantly with the full participation of the mediating party/state (OIC, Libya and Indonesia). There were also "consultations and intensive dialogues in all levels"<sup>34</sup> which reinforced the confidence of the parties to reach an agreement. This is because "mediation is basically a political process...and is a triangular relationship."<sup>35</sup>

5. The agenda of the negotiations were resolved and completed into what is now known as the Final 1996 Peace Agreement. The Agreement may be acceptable to other parties who were not involved in the negotiations (like the MILF) with certain modifications mutually acceptable to all parties.

A prominent and respected Muslim-Filipino Professor once concluded, “The Tripoli Agreement is a milestone in the history of Filipino nation-building as it marks the very first covenant for brotherhood and national unity between the Christian Filipino and the Bangsamoro.”<sup>36</sup> In the same manner, the 1996 Peace Agreement as the “final agreement On the implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement...served as basis for a just, lasting, honorable and comprehensive solution to the problem in Southern Philippines *within the framework of the Philippine Constitution* [italics mine].”<sup>37</sup>

As shown in the Schematic Overview of the Agenda (See Appendix) all the issues in the Tripoli Agreement have now been resolved and the provisions completed. The GRP can now confidently claim, “The Agreement has been hailed worldwide as a *model for conflict resolution* through negotiation and dialogue.”<sup>38</sup>

It can then be said that the 1996 Peace Agreement stands today as an internationally acceptable document, legally and morally binding on the Philippine government and the MNLF (as the recognized representative of the Bangsamoro people in the OIC forum) in attaining Peace in Muslim Mindanao.

## Recommendations

The solution to the Mindanao conflict does not lie in the application of “palliative measures that will solve only the effect and not the causes”<sup>39</sup> of the problem. The military option does not apply either because even if we were to consider it as vital and necessary, it is still “not a sufficient solution to deter and resolve insurgency.”<sup>40</sup> Military actions applied since the American regime only brought death and destruction to the area while the root causes of the conflict still remained.

The formula should be comprehensive and the approach holistic. This is precisely the intention of the 1996 Peace Agreement—to serve “as a basis for a just, lasting, honorable and comprehensive solution to the problem in Southern Philippines within the framework of the Philippine Constitution.”<sup>41</sup>

But the mere signing and presence of an agreement does not automatically mean the problem is solved. Former President Ramos had earlier said, "The root causes of the problems that led to these decades of conflict in Mindanao will not go away with this Agreement."<sup>42</sup> Indonesian Foreign Minister Alatas also said, "A Peace Agreement...does not implement itself."<sup>43</sup>

After having gone through almost ten years of implementation, albeit with some delays, the parties to the agreement cannot simply take a step backward, or make complaints and find faults. The search for peace has to move forward. There is no turning back from the road to peace.

It is within this context that I humbly submit the following recommendations for consideration with the hope that the same will help policymakers and implementers in government to come up with an effective implementation of the Agreement:

1. **Qualified Muslims should be appointed to positions in the National Government. This should not only be limited to offices created for the Muslims like the Office on Muslim Affairs, the Islamic Bank (the Author served as Member of the Board, 1997-1998) and others.**

The word "qualified" is emphasized because the candidate should not only be recommended by some leaders from the area or even by the national leadership. He or she should also be evaluated on the basis of merit. Appointment to government positions on the basis of patronage politics should be minimized if not totally eradicated. Government should give premium to the quality of Muslim leaders instead of the quantity of men and resources that they can muster especially during election time.<sup>44</sup>

I also believe that there is need for the Muslims in Mindanao to be permanently represented in the National Security Council. The management of national security refers "to how we are organized to formulate policies and make decisions that affect our national survival and welfare and well-being of our people."<sup>45</sup> This is a very important function of government done at the highest level. As such, the membership of a recognized Muslim leader from Mindanao in the Council would certainly contribute to the building of mutual confidence between government and its Muslim population. This could become a very important feature of the peace formula for Muslim Mindanao. This seat will be symbolic of the national consciousness that the Muslims are not threats to national security but constitute a strong and indispensable pillar of national unity and brotherhood.

2. **A permanent relationship with the Organization of Islamic Conference**

(OIC) should be established as a matter of foreign policy<sup>46</sup>

The Government should not merely be sending missions to the OIC only when there is a scheduled OIC meeting. It should develop a more permanent relationship with the OIC. The MNLF holds the status of "Observer" in the OIC. It should not be difficult for the GRP to work on this idea after the expanded Autonomous Government envisioned in the Peace Agreement shall have been established. The basis of the GRP linking itself with the OIC is the presence of a sizeable Muslim population in the country recognized by the OIC.

3. **The issue of territory remains and therefore needs to be re-evaluated and settled.**

One very critical issue already resolved in the negotiations but still subject to the approval of the people in a plebiscite is the question of territory. A study on Muslim Autonomy conducted by a Maranao scholar, Dr. Sukarno D. Tanggol, for his doctoral dissertation at the College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines,<sup>47</sup> argued that the "proposed area of autonomy is primarily based on two opposing principles: "the need to respond to the Muslim's quest for self-determination and social justice; and "the so-called realities of today." "It is a mediation between these two extremes."

But in view of the insistence of the MILF to have its own territory where they can apply Islamic Law without demanding "for an outright grant of independence,"<sup>48</sup> I suggest a modification of Dr. Tanggol's proposal. Instead of the *one autonomous region that is the ARMM*, the modification will be the setting up of *two autonomous regions*, namely:

1. The Central Mindanao Autonomous Region (CMAR) and
2. The Western Mindanao Autonomous Region (WMAR)

This set-up was accepted by the people in the 10 Provinces in the 1977 plebiscite. It even operated from 1979 to 1990 until it was replaced by the smaller and politically and economically non-viable ARMM.

My proposal will not violate the Peace Agreement but will fulfill the provision for "the expansion of the present ARMM area of Autonomy."<sup>49</sup> The intention of the Peace Agreement is "for an amendment to or repeal of the Organic Act (6734) of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)" to be "submitted to the people of the concerned areas in a plebiscite to determine the establishment of a new autonomous government and the specific area of autonomy thereof."<sup>50</sup>

While it may be argued that the intention of the Peace Agreement is for the establishment of one autonomous region consistent with the stand of the unified MNLF leadership of 1976, the final decision, in a democratic state, is to be made by the people in a plebiscite. The people should be the

final arbiter on whether to maintain the present case of a single autonomous region or to choose to have *two separate autonomous regions* consistent with their historical experience as separate Sultanates (Sulu, Maguindanao and Lanao).

This is a critical issue that has to be addressed in the GRP-MILF negotiations, which needs the participation of the MNLF. This formula is a radical departure from the one-autonomy concept that has already been overtaken by events (like the rise of the MILF, among others). Let the sovereign will of the people pronounce the final verdict, which the MNLF and MILF cannot reject. With the approval of both the MNLF and MILF on this issue, the OIC will certainly not make any objection. The Peace Agreement therefore will not be violated.

On the other hand, the Philippine Congress should include the provision in the Peace Agreement, which says, “Clusters of contiguous Muslim-dominated municipalities voting in favor of autonomy will be merged and constituted into a new province(s) which shall become part of the New Autonomous Region.”<sup>51</sup>

And in order to get the correct responses from the people, the following questions are proposed to be presented to them in the plebiscite that will be conducted in the 14 Provinces and the cities therein as follows:

#### A. CENTRAL MINDANAO

1. For the Provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur and Marawi City (since they are part of the ARMM) the question to be asked is: *Do you want to constitute yourselves into one Autonomous Region called the CENTRAL MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION in lieu of the ARMM?*

2. For the City of Cotabato (since it is not part of the ARMM), the question to be asked is: *Do you want to join the Autonomous Region to be called the CENTRAL MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION?*

3. For the Provinces of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Lanao del Norte with Iligan City, (since they are part of Region XII) the question to be asked are:

i) *Do you want to join the CENTRAL MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION?*

ii) *Do you want to remain with Region XII?*

4. For the Provinces of Davao del Sur, South Cotabato and Sarangani, (since they are part of Region XI) the questions to be asked are:

i) *Do you want to join CENTRAL MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION?*

ii) *Do you want to remain with Region XI?*



## B. WESTERN MINDANAO

1. For the Provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan (since they are part of the ARMM), the question to be asked is: *Do you want to constitute yourselves into one single autonomous region to be called the WESTERN MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION in lieu of the ARMM?*
2. For the Provinces of Zamboanga Del Sur with Pagadian City, and Zamboanga del Norte with Dipolog City and Isabela City in Basilan (since they are not part of the ARMM but of Region IX) the questions to be asked are:
  - i) Do you want to join the WESTERN MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION?
  - ii) Do you want to remain with Region IX?
3. For Palawan and Puerto Princesa (since they are not part of ARMM but Region IV), the questions to be asked are:
  - i) Do you want to join the WESTERN MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION?
  - ii) Do you want to remain with Region IV?

This approach is constitutional and is in keeping with the historical experience of the people in these areas.

The possible outcome of the plebiscite in terms of area under this scheme might be as follows:

## A. CENTRAL MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION:

1. Maguindanao with Cotabato City
2. Lanao del Sur with Marawi City
3. Certain Municipalities in Lanao Norte voting YES
4. Certain Municipalities in Sultan Kudarat voting YES
5. Certain Municipalities in North Cotabato voting YES
6. Certain Municipalities in South Cotabato voting YES
7. Certain Municipalities in Davao del Sur voting YES

## B. WESTERN MINDANAO AUTONOMOUS REGION

1. Sulu
2. Basilan
3. Tawi-Tawi
4. Certain Municipalities in Zamboanga del Sur voting YES
5. Certain Municipalities in Zamboanga del Norte voting YES

6. Certain Municipalities in Southern Palawan voting YES

The MILF leadership (since it is dominated by the Maguindanao and the Maranao) will certainly fit in the Central Mindanao Autonomous Region.

The MNLF (since they are dominated by the Tausug-Samal-Yakan) will certainly find their place in Western Mindanao Autonomous Region.

All these leaders will have to submit themselves to the electorate in their respective areas of autonomy in Regional Elections that will be conducted in accordance with law.

This political and administrative set-up will encourage constructive competition among the different tribal Muslims groups instead of the current rivalry for Muslim leadership in the one autonomous region of the ARMM. Their unity in Islam will remain while their historical patterns of leadership will be enhanced.

After his successful handling of the negotiations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke wrote a book<sup>52</sup> where he quoted Jean Monnet, the great architect of European unity, who once said: "Nothing is possible without men, but nothing is lasting without institutions."

This formula may produce "lasting institutions" where the people will exercise their sovereign rights to select their own leaders. The two Autonomous Regions will fall into place under the concept of a federalism now being proposed by some sectors in Philippine society.

4. **An effective rehabilitation and development plan for Mindanao must be implemented.**

The Rehabilitation and Development Plan for Mindanao, or some sort of a "mini-Marshall Plan" for Mindanao can be implemented as soon as the political and administrative set-up suggested above are already put in place.

5. **The appropriate concept of national security must be the guiding framework behind any policy or action in the interest of developing Mindanao and maintaining peace.**

There are two schools of thought on the concept and framework of national security.<sup>53</sup> The first school of thought views national security as the protection of people and territories from physical assault. It is equated with national defense. It views threats to a nation's security as emanating solely from the outside. This is the view that gained prominence before the 1950s.<sup>54</sup>

The second school of thought maintains that national security has a broader meaning. In addition to national defense, it includes the protection of vital economic and political interest, the loss of which could threaten fundamental values and the vitality of the state itself. It sees national

security as the concern not only of the military but also of the entire citizenry. It views threats to national security as emanating from both within and outside the country.<sup>55</sup>

The National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP), the highest educational institution in the country that is dedicated to the conduct of advanced programs in national security administration has its working definition of National Security. It is “the state or condition wherein the people’s way of life and institutions, their territorial integrity and sovereignty including their well-being are protected and enhanced.”<sup>56</sup>

The following constitute the seven dimensions or components of national security, namely:

- a. **Territorial Integrity.** The territory of the country is intact and under the effective control of the Government.
- b. **Ecological Balance.** The environment is able to support sustainable development strategies for the benefit of the nation and the people who depend on it for their existence.
- c. **Socio-Political Stability.** There is peace and harmony among the divergent groups of people in the country, and mutual cooperation and support exist between Government and people as a whole.
- d. **Economic Solidarity.** The economy is strong, capable of supporting national endeavors, and derives its strength from the solidarity of the people who have an organic stake in it through participation and ownership.
- e. **Cultural Cohesiveness.** The people share the values and beliefs handed down by their forebears and possess a strong sense of attachment to the national community despite their religious, ethnic and linguistic differences.
- f. **Moral-Spiritual Consensus.** There is moral and spiritual consensus among the people on the wisdom and righteousness of the national vision, and they are inspired by their patriotism and national pride to participate vigorously in the pursuit of the country’s goal and objectives.
- g. **External Peace.** The country and the people enjoy cordial relations with their neighbors, and they are free from any control, interference or threat of aggression from any of them.

All these elements, taking place simultaneously together, bring about internal stability, development and peace as well as external peace and good relations with other nations.<sup>57</sup> This is the paradigm of national security.

The Mindanao Conflict that erupted into a full scale war a couple

of months after the declaration of Martial Law in September 1972 posed as the most serious threat to national security since the country's independence in 1946. In the words of now Retired General Fortunato Abat (Commander of AFP's Central Mindanao Command, 1973-1976), "the continued escalation of unrest in Central Mindanao reached national security proportions that required the...AFP to react with a massive response to check the full grown threat to the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity."<sup>58</sup>

The 1996 Peace Agreement very clearly recognizes "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines."<sup>59</sup> This is a reiteration of earlier provisions agreed upon by the MNLF and the GRP in the Tripoli Agreement with "the participation of the Organization of Islamic Conference...which has consistently reiterated its respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines."<sup>60</sup> The effective implementation of this Agreement therefore allows us to grant autonomy to Muslim Mindanao as embodied in the 1987 Constitution without violating the country's sovereignty and **territorial integrity**.

The concerns on **ecological balance** and **economic solidarity** are among the core issues in the Mindanao conflict. It has been established through empirical studies that the natural resources of Southern Philippines have been left for a long time to the exploitative hands of foreign companies whose "dominating presence...has seriously impaired the sovereignty and independence of the country."<sup>61</sup> The presence of these foreign firms has no doubt created wealth and income in the Region but a great majority of the people has not benefited from it. Large amounts of wealth have been siphoned off to other countries or even to other regions in the country. This situation was one of the causes of social unrest in Mindanao and in the case of the MNLF, it escalated into a full-scale war with the Government. The Peace Agreement has addressed these issues as it contains provisions on "the economic and financial system, mines and minerals."<sup>62</sup>

The effective implementation of the Peace Agreement will pave the way for the establishment of an autonomous political unit within the parameters of the Constitution.<sup>63</sup> This will respond to the legitimate demand of the people, particularly the Muslims for a

limited self-rule in Southern Philippines.

Considered being the core of the grievances of the Muslims in Mindanao is political autonomy. This is consistent with their history since colonial times where their forefathers heroically defended these institutions from foreign invaders. The **socio-political stability** in the Autonomous Regions, will contribute in no small measure to the stability of the country where there is “mutual cooperation and support exist between Government and people as a whole.”

The main force that galvanized the Muslim Sultanates to stand up against colonial Spain was Islam. This is the same force that motivated the Muslims to resist American rule. In times of chaos, it was Islam that nevertheless served as the main agent of **cultural cohesiveness** in Muslim communities. This force is now recognized in the 1996 Peace Agreement as it allows the Autonomous Government to “perpetuate Filipino and Islamic ideals and aspirations, Islamic values and orientations of the Bangsamoro people. It shall develop the total, spiritual, intellectual, social, cultural, scientific and physical aspects of the Bangsamoro people to make them God-fearing, productive, patriotic citizens, conscious of their Filipino and Islamic values and Islamic cultural heritage under the aegis of a just and equitable society.”<sup>64</sup> This provision in the Agreement reinforced the Constitutional provision on religious freedom and in the long run, through education, **moral and spiritual consensus** for the nation will be achieved.

**External peace** will be achieved, particularly with regard to the country's diplomatic ties with the Muslim countries if the relationship with the OIC is developed into a permanent feature of the country's foreign policy.

The effective implementation of the Peace Agreement will provide the answers to the legitimate aspirations of the Muslims for political autonomy within the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Philippine Government and will therefore produce the objective conditions favorable to national security.

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**Endnotes, Chapter 7**

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- <sup>2</sup> Gavin Kennedy, *The Perfect Negotiation*. London: Century Business, 1992, p. 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Gabriel Lopez, Coverdale Organization (Copyright, 1990), *Selected Readings in Conflict Resolution...*
- <sup>4</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* pp.4, 22 and 23.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Lopez, *Selected Readings in Conflict Resolution...*
- <sup>7</sup> Ramos, "Break Not the Peace..." p. 4.
- <sup>8</sup> Lopez, *Selected Readings in Conflict Resolution...*
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- <sup>10</sup> Lopez, *Selected Readings on Conflict Resolution...*
- <sup>11</sup> Ramos, "Break Not the Peace..." p. 99
- <sup>12</sup> Lopez, *Selected Readings in Conflict Resolution...*
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 27-28.
- <sup>16</sup> Lopez, *Selected Readings on Conflict Resolution...*
- <sup>17</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 19.
- <sup>18</sup> Various Resolutions of the OIC beginning in 1977 when the MNLF was conferred the "Observer" status during the OIC Foreign Ministers Meeting in Benghazi, Libya..
- <sup>19</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* pp. 5 and 100
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 97.
- <sup>21</sup> Lopez, *Selected Readings on Conflict Resolution...*
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ramos, "Break Not the Peace..." p. 101.
- <sup>24</sup> MNLF Manifesto, March 18, 1974. MNLF Secretariat File.
- <sup>25</sup> Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 5.
- <sup>26</sup> President Ramos' Memorandum to the GRP Panel dated April 26, 1993. This is also found in "Break Not the Peace..." p. 30.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 103.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.101.

- 29 Quoted in Lopez, *Selected Readings on Conflict Resolution...* from Jay M. Shafritz, Todd J. A. Shafritz, and David B. Robertson, *Dictionary of Military Science*, 1989
- 30 Ibid, from Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- 31 1987 Philippine Constitution
- 32 Ramos, *Break Not the Peace...* p. 100.
- 33 Zartman and Touval, op. cit., p. 242.
- 34 Executive Summary, Fourth Round of Formal Talks, Jakarta, Indonesia, August 28-30, 1996. Para. 94.
- 35 Ibid, pp. 242, 243 and 253.
- 36 Prof. Manaros Boransing, "The Tripoli Agreement: A New Covenant of Philippine Nationhood and a Framework for Total Development of the Bangsamoro," (A paper presented at the Conference on "Tripoli Agreement: Problems and Prospects," International Studies Institute of the Philippines, University of the Philippines, College of Law, Diliman, Quezon City, September 12-13, 1985). Prof. Boransing served as Member of the Board of Directors of Al-Amanah Islamic Investment of the Philippines with the Author in 1997-1998.
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- 42 President Fidel V. Ramos, "Break Not the Peace: We are All Victors," (Speech delivered at the signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, September 2, 1996).
- 43 Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, "Official Statement," (Delivered at the signing of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, Malacanang Palace, Manila, September 2, 1996).
- 44 A case in point is the story of incumbent ARMM Governor Nur Misuari. He had no men and resources behind him when he ran in the 1971 Constitutional Convention election. He had only talent and the diploma from the University of the Philippines. He lost and that episode must have made him bitter against the government. What followed is now part of Mindanao's bloody history.
- 45 NSC Deputy Director General Romeo T. Hernandez, "The Management of National Security," (A paper delivered at the National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP), Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City for MNSA Classes 34 and 35, January 11, 2000).
- 46 The GRP under the Ramos Administration sent an Aide Memoire to the OIC dated October 15, 1994 signed by President Ramos. In the GRP-MNLF Formal Talks, one of the three objectives was "The establishment of a fair and constructive consensus with the Islamic countries, based on goodwill and mutual trust and through the good offices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Six, on a peaceful, comprehensive and durable settlement of the problem of Muslims in

Southern Philippines.”

<sup>47</sup> Sukarno D. Tanggol, *Muslim Autonomy in the Philippines: Rhetoric and Reality*. Marawi City: Mindanao State University, 1993, pp. 279-296.

<sup>48</sup> Jubair, Bangsamoro: A Nation... p. 263.

<sup>49</sup> Peace Agreement, Para 2.a.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, Para 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, Para 2.b.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War*. New York: Random House, 1998, p. 365.

<sup>53</sup> *Selected Readings (NSA 207 - National Security Management)*. National Defense College of the Philippine (NDCP), Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, MNSA Class 35.

<sup>54</sup> National Security Council Deputy Director General Romeo T. Hernandez, “The Management of National Security,” Lecture delivered at the NDCP for MNSA Classes 34 & 35, January 11, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> National Security Terminology, NDCP.

<sup>57</sup> “Conceptual Framework of National Security” in *Selected Readings (NSA 207...)*

<sup>58</sup> Fortunato U. Abat, *The Day We Nearly Lost Mindanao: The CEMCOM Story*. (Manila: Fortunato Abat, 1993, p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> The Peace Agreement...11<sup>th</sup> Preamble Clause.

<sup>60</sup> Justice Secretary Franklin Drilon (now President of the Philippine Senate) in his letter to Senator Rodolfo Biazon, September 14, 1994.

<sup>61</sup> Eduardo C. Tadem, “The Political Economy of Mindanao: An Overview,” in *Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promise*. Edited by Mark Turner, R.J. May and Lulu Respal Turner. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992, p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> Peace Agreement, Para 126-151.

<sup>63</sup> Article X, Sections 15 to 21 provided for the establishment of the Autonomous Regions.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, Para 95 (Education).





## Appendices



**BANGSAMORO REPUBLIK**  
**MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT**  
 Central Committee  
 Office of the Chairman



جمهورية بانجا-مورو  
 جبهة تحرير مورو الوطنية  
 مكتب الرئيس - اللجنة المركزية

From the Desk of  
**PROF. NUR MISUARI**  
 Chairman

من مكتب بروفييسر نور مسواري  
 الامين العام

Directive NO. 01. 12.06.92.JDH.

# APPOINTMENT

Dear Brother Abraham Iribani:

Assalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarkatuho.

In my capacity as Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Commander-In-Chief of the Bangsamoro Armed Forces (BAF), and in consideration of your steadfastness in serving the sacred cause of the Bangsamoro Jihad Fii Sabilillah, I hereby decide to appoint you as SPECIAL EMISSARY of the MNLF Chairman, Central Committee, on the peace process with the present Philippine government under President Ramos. In order to be able to carry out your task effectively, you are hereby authorized to set up your office in Manila. Accordingly, you shall be principally responsible in serving as our channel of information to and from the Philippine side.

Anticipating the highest form of dedication and faithfulness to your duty for the success of our people's Jihad Fii Sabilillah; and invoking Allah's Mercy and Guidance in the performance of your sacred task, we remain.

For immediate compliance.

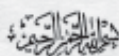


Prof. Nur Misuari 28/12/92 JHD  
 Chairman, MNLF, CC

VICTORY OR TO THE GRAVE

« النصر أو الشهادة »

غازي يا شهيد



BANGSAMORO REPUBLIC  
MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT  
CENTRAL COMMITTEE  
OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

DATE .....

Brother Abeth Iribani  
Manila  
Philippines

Dear Brother Iribani:

Assalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarkatuho.

With sincerity and commendation, I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter (dated November 12, 1992) that you sent to us through Brother Murshi Ibrahim. Your reports have given us the real picture anent the Ramos' administration and its policy towards the Bangsamoro people and the MNLF-led Jihad. Fii Sabilillah, and it serves as our frame of reference in the formulation of policy-making.

Brother Murshi Ibrahim told me about your relentless effort and unwavering commitment to the noble cause of our Nation and Islam. Just continue the heroic task with courage, vigilance and patience. For PATIENCE is victory.

I pray to Allah, the Almighty, to crown your effort in consolidating the supports and cooperation of our Moro brethren everywhere in our national homeland and here in Metro Manila.

Wassalam

Jihadistically yours,

Nur Misuari 25/11/92 *Nur Misuari*  
Chairman

PS. Thank you very much for the T-shirts



VICTORY OR TO THE GRAVEYARD

« النصر أو الشهادة »

غازی یا شہید

**CONFIDENTIAL**

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
 Negotiation Panel for the Peace Talks with the  
 Southern Philippine Autonomous Groups  
**GRP-SPAG**

**Negotiation Panel**

Ambassador Manuel T. Yan  
 Chairman

Representative Eduardo R. Ermita  
 Vice Chairman

ARMM Vice Governor Nabil Tan  
 Member

State Prosecutor Sandale A. Sambolawan  
 Member

Professor Rudy Rodil  
 Member

**Panel Advisers**

Secretary Renato S. De Vito

Senator Orlando S. Mercado

Representative Nur G. Jaurer

**Technical Committee**

Undersecretary Feliciano M. Garcia  
 Chairman

**Panel Secretariat**

Dr. Petelle L. Lorier  
 Executive Director

27 December 1993

To whom it may concern:

This is to introduce **MR. ABRAHAM IRIBANI** whose signature appears below, as the Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) Secretariat, with whom the Peace Panel of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP-SPAG) coordinates with on administrative matters pertaining to the on-going Committee meetings in the Philippines as part of the peace process with the MNLF, pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement forged in the First Stage of the Formal Peace Talks between the GRP and MNLF Peace Panels.

Any assistance you extend to him which would facilitate the on-going meetings as part of the peace process would be deeply appreciated.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Very truly yours,

**MANUEL T. YAN**  
 GRP-SPAG Chairman

Signature of Mr. Iribani





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5. **Executive Summary, First Formal Talks,** Jakarta, Indonesia, 25 October – 7 November 1993
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With Chairman Mihar at the Sari Pan Pacific Hotel, 3rd Round of Formal Talks, Nov. 27 to Dec. 1, 1995. Abet was typing the speech of the Chairman for the Opening Ceremony. Jakarta, Indonesia.



